CORONET

Edith Engren

MARCY TARRANT

THE FIERY SAGA OF A TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY REBEL WHO SOUGHT HER OWN SPECIAL DESTINY

MARCY TARRANT

Marcy looked at him. The man is so handsome, she thought, so virile—and so transparent! I can feel the animal power he exudes, and there's no doubt about what he wants. And suddenly, I want it too. I know I'm not in love, but what has love got to do with the way I feel? This is more elemental, it's a wanting, a hot desire for Jacques Demaret. And by Eros and Aphrodite, I want him now.

And I'll have him . . .

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Edith Engren

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

"I don't belong here, Aunt Dora," Marcy Tarrant said, an edge of desperation in her voice.

"Nonsense!" Dora Laughlin said firmly. Her long fingers straightened Marcy's orchid corsage. "Don't forget you're a Laughlin, Marcy. There's not a family in San Francisco can look down on the Laughlins—or dares to. Twenty-two years ago your mother came down those stairs as a Nautilus Maiden. I'm sure that she had the all-overs, just as you have. Any eighteen-year-old girl would be excited. So you'll see—when you reach the bottom of the stairs, and you stand before the lovely nautilus shell, all your qualms will fade away. From that moment you'll have a wonderful time."

That wasn't what I meant, Marcy thought. *Is Aunt Dora being obtuse? She can be when she wants to.* Marcy shook her head, amidst the confused scene in the huge dressing room of the Nautilus Club. At the dressing tables before brightly lighted mirrors sat eleven girls, all near Marcy's age. Around them their mothers hovered anxiously, tossing instructions at crisp-uniformed maids—tweak that stray lock of hair, replace that missing handkerchief, or hurry away on that suddenly desperate errand. The girls were like a covey of brilliantly plumaged birds; twittering, chattering, preening their pretty feathers. And they loved every moment of this confusion, thrilled with the exciting things to come.

Dora Laughlin gave Marcy's corsage a final pat. "There, dear, that's better," she said. "I've got to go now, it's nearly midnight. Let's have a final look at you, child."

Obediently, Marcy slid down from her high stool in the corner and stepped in front of the pier glass. She felt confidence flowing back, a reassuring warm calm, for the image in the mirror was pleasing. She really did look beautiful, she thought. Standing proudly, she ran her palms down the long lines of her body, from the thrust of her breasts over the slim waist, and the trim curve of her hips. *I do have some advantages,* she admitted. *I'm taller than most of the girls, and I'm the only redhead in the dozen.* (Aunt Dora

insisted that the correct term was *Titian.*) *I do believe I can stand up to any of these girls, in this gown.*

M. Perrault had been right, she thought, remembering the words of one of the two most prestigious couturiers in San Francisco. He had said, "Ah, Mlle. Tarrant, zis gown fit you like ze *papier* on ze wall. You have such a fine line—you mus' not spoil ze line. Jus' ze wisp of satin corset. No stays, no bones, no heavy camisole, or ze effect of our gown is ruined, don' you see?"

Marcy had obeyed his instructions. The ivory satin, with its almost invisible vertical shadowing, did make her look tall and sleek. M. Perrault had given the gown a wide, deep décolletage to set off Marcy's strong shoulders. The cap sleeves minimized the fullness of her arms. The color of the satin complemented perfectly the striking dark red of her hair. For the rest—teeth good in a mouth a little too wide, the eyes green and bright, the nose a shade too long and a trifle crooked, since the fall from a tree when she was seven. But as her father would say, "A man on a galloping horse wouldn't notice it."

Turning away from the mirror, she said, "Well, I guess there's not much more can be done, after the dressmaker and the masseuse and the hairdresser have done their best. I'll have to take my chances."

"Pshaw! Don't be such a pessimist, darling. You look perfectly lovely," Dora Laughlin said. She leaned close. "You know that practically every eligible young man in San Francisco will be here, looking at all you beautiful girls."

"Like the captives paraded on auction, waiting for some man to bid for them?"

Her aunt gave Marcy an exasperated look. "Now, child, boys must meet girls, and girls must meet boys. Where better than in this setting? The Nautilus Ball is *the* social event of our season, remember?"

"I suppose," Marcy said, with a shrug. "But I'm not in the marriage market, Aunt Dora. I have so many other plans. I don't want to settle down with some rich young man and start raising a family. Not yet, at least."

"Plans, plans! One of these days the love bug will bite you, Marceline Tarrant. Then all your pretty plans will fly out the window, and you'll sing a different tune. Now here comes your Aunt Claribel. It must be time to leave. Remember, don't get your hair mussed, nor your slippers scuffed. And for goodness sake, don't bite your nails."

As Claribel Laughlin joined them, Dora patted Marcy's shoulder and touched soft lips to her cheek. "Watch for your cue. We're going to be so proud of you and Patsy, aren't we, Claribel?"

The plump wife of Marcy's Uncle Chalmers nodded dazedly, so engrossed with her daughter Patsy she hardly glanced at Marcy. As her two aunts slipped out the side door Marcy felt an odd sense of abandonment. She took her place again on the tall stool, watching the others.

The only true friend she had among the eleven was her cousin Patsy. With the others she had at best a nodding acquaintance. She lacked the patina of wealth they had acquired from nannies and tutors and exclusive schools; Marcy had got her education at the public schools nearest her father's construction projects, except for this past year. Tom Tarrant had been dragooned by Claribel and Dora into sending Marcy to Miss Spofford's Academy in New Haven, the school Patsy was attending. Aunt Dora had convinced Tom that Marcy needed the polish such a school could give; she needed to meet an elite group of girls her age.

These other girls, Marcy thought grimly, didn't need polishing. They were born to shine brightly, born to the purple, and they know it.

It was environment, more than money, Marcy decided. Tarrant Construction had made Tough Tom Tarrant a millionaire, at least from time to time. But the Tarrant fortune was picayune compared with the wealth of the Floods and the Fairs, Spreckels and Crockers, Mackays and O'Neils, the Stanfords and Costains and Laughlins. For many of those families, the Mother Lode and the Comstock had spewed out massive treasures of gold and silver. Endless streams of wealth had poured into San Francisco like a torrent for them, from Idaho and Montana, from Nevada and Colorado and Arizona. The great families owned mills and shipping lines, banks and railroads and office buildings. They controlled vast stretches of land, streetcar lines, power plants. All these holdings swelled personal fortunes already prodigious. On that ocean of wealth, a mere millionaire like Tom Tarrant was afloat in a rowboat.

Marcy was not envious. Truthfully, she felt rather sorry for these bright-winged lovelies. The vastness of their wealth circumscribed their world. They had little communication with the masses. The coachman's son might be personable, talented, brilliant, but he would be granted no social contact

with these daughters. The few exceptions were the young men who managed to eke out a degree at U.C. or Leland Stanford and turned themselves into successful doctors or lawyers, or by bitter labor fought their way up through the ranks of the great banks. Even then the world of the rich and great would look on such a man's marriage to one of the golden girls as touched with a kind of shame.

That world was not a world for her, Marcy thought. There were too many other exciting things in life.

Her musings were interrupted by the opening of the inner door. For a moment the dressing room was flooded with the singing of violins playing a Strauss waltz. As the door closed, a taut silence came over the room. A tribute, Marcy thought, to the commanding presence of the woman who had just entered. Mrs. Norbert Costain was the chairman of the Nautilus Maiden Pageant. She wielded the final power of favor and prestige over the twelve girls selected by her committee to grace this year's Nautilus Ball.

Mrs. Costain, a tall woman, ample of thigh and bust, was dressed in an elegant gown of green crushed velvet. It was hard to discern the details of the gown, for Cleopatra Costain was literally dripping with diamonds. Her high-coiffed, pearl-gray hair was crowned with a diamond tiara. Her earrings were matched marquise diamonds. Both arms from wrist to elbow coruscated with her many bracelets, and diamond rings flashed as her hands moved in the glow of electric light. Her diamond choker had one magnificent jewel at its center and a myriad of smaller ones spraying blue-white lights. And regally, from ample bosom to corseted waist Mrs. Costain was sheathed in an armor-plate device so studded with diamonds Marcy found it blinding. She thought the Costain vaults must have been emptied for this occasion. Then Marcy corrected herself—not necessarily *emptied*, knowing the immense assets of Costain Brothers, the great banking firm with its ties to Costain *Frères*, the French international bankers.

With authority like the crack of a whip in her voice, Cleopatra Costain said, "Come now, girls. It's almost ten minutes to midnight. I'm sure you realize your signal honor, more solemn in a way than the role of Nautilus Maidens in past years. Your debut tonight will mark the end of one century and the beginning of another. I don't want any girl to make the slightest faux-pas. The schedule we rehearsed must be followed exactly—exactly, you understand? Since you go first, dear Avis Huntingdon, listen for the first chime.

I will have it sounded at precisely three minutes before midnight."

"Yes, Mrs. Costain," the heiress to uncounted millions said meekly.

"Fifteen seconds later, at the next chime, my own dear Della will follow. Then Patricia Laughlin, and the rest in order. As you appear, you will pause a moment at the head of the stair, then as the applause resounds, you will gracefully descend the stair and take your place in front of the great nautilus shell. Any questions?"

"No, Mrs. Costain," the girls chorused.

"Good. At exactly the stroke of midnight, December 31, 1899, our last girl, Miss—uh, Marceline Tarrant, is it?—will come down the stairs. The orchestra will break into 'Auld Lang Syne,' and everyone will sing it, welcoming the turn-of-the-century Nautilus Maidens. Your pendants will be presented to you, then your sponsors will claim you for a dance. The program over, you will partake of the supper. No mistakes now, girls, for you twelve young ladies are the envy of every girl of your age in all San Francisco—perhaps even the whole world. On this great occasion you will be the cynosure of all eyes."

Confident that none of the twelve would dare make a mistake, Cleopatra Costain swept out. As the door opened and closed, the music swelled and died. At her departure, the chatter of the girls broke out again as they took their places in line. Marcy moved down the line to the end—where I *should* be, she thought.

She stopped beside her cousin Patsy and touched the younger girl's cheek. "Good luck, honey," she said. "You look beautiful."

"Marcy, I'm scared!" Patsy babbled. Her round, ingenuous face was pale. A bead of perspiration glistened on her upper lip. Marcy dabbed it away with her own lace handkerchief. Patsy's intensity made Marcy wonder if there were something wrong with herself For Marcy this was a charade.

"I—I think I'm going to throw up," Patsy said, gulping.

"Nonsense!" Marcy said, borrowing their Aunt Dora's expression. "Your blue gown is lovely and your coiffure is grand. You look as pretty as a Dresden figurine. Straighten up now. Just think of how all the boys will be admiring you from the dance floor. That Costain boy—what's his name, Paul?—will have eyes for no other girl but you."

The color flowed back into Patsy's cheeks. "Oh, Marcy, you

always know just what to say! I'll just keep thinking about Paul—Marcy, he's so handsome—and maybe I'll manage those stairs without going head over heels."

"Of course you will," Marcy said, and moved on to the last place in line.

A verse of Scripture echoed through her mind. "The first shall be last, and the last first, for many are called, but few are chosen." Marcy smiled at the patness of it. Mrs. Costain's delicate assessment of social status might have been misled this time. For the girl who appeared at the top of the staircase at the exact end of the old century would catch the fancy of the crowd. Everyone would see Marcy as the symbol of a new age and a new century.

Now Marcy did feel a mild excitement, at the thought of what the new century might mean to her. It hinted of wide vistas, and she wanted them to open for her. She yearned to build, to create, to travel, to try all the things this twentieth century must hold for her.

She had assets. She could speak excellent French, adequate German, and rudimentary Italian. She was good in mathematics. She had no particular talent for art or music, but she appreciated them. Of course there would be a husband and a family some day, but not, she vowed, until she had savored some of the thrilling things life must hold.

A chime rang, and Avis Huntingdon went out, tall, willowy, poised. A distant burst of applause greeted her, but Marcy hardly noticed it, she was so deep in thought. The departures of Della Costain, then of the nervous Patsy Laughlin, barely registered with Marcy, engrossed in dreams. It was only when Mrs. Costain's secretary nudged her anxiously and said, "Miss Tarrant, you're next. Get ready," that Marcy came back to the present with a start.

The chime rang, the secretary swung the door wide, and Marcy stepped out into the blaze of crystal chandeliers. From the balcony, the blinding beam of a spotlight centered on her. From below came a tremendous burst of applause. With one hand on the railing, Marcy lifted the hem of her long skirt slightly with the other gloved hand, and descended the curving staircase with measured steps. She concealed the relief she felt as she stood beside the eleven other girls in front of the great *papier-maché* nautilus shell. The spotlight died, and she could look out into the sea of faces. She felt at last a lift of excitement as the orchestra swung into "Auld Lang Syne." Smiling, she joined in the singing.

As the second chorus ended, corks began to pop, cries of "Happy New Year!" arose, and the pretty girls were soundly kissed by friend and stranger In the turmoil Marcy could hear the muffled boom of saluting guns from the Presidio and Fort Mason, the clanging of church bells throughout the city, and the foghorns and sirens and whistles that ushered in this brave new century.

Marcy saw Cleopatra Costain, ruddy with exertion and flushed with triumph, signal to Gus Thalberg, the orchestra leader, with a diamond-encrusted hand. Thalberg lifted his baton, and the violins took up the lilting phrases of "The Blue Danube." The sponsors came forward proudly to claim the first dance with their own Nautilus Maidens. Chalmers Laughlin proudly swept away his Patsy.

Marcy smiled at her father as he came up to claim her. He was of medium height, powerfully built. His once-red hair had faded to a pinkish hue, and was beginning to recede at the temples. His broad forehead was marked by a Z-shaped scar, a memento of a falling tackle block some years before. His gray eyes twinkled under bushy brows; snub nose and humorous mouth marked indelibly the origins of this red Ulsterman.

He hugged Marcy to him in a clasp that almost cracked her ribs. Holding her off at arms' length, he said "My God, mavourneen, but you're a lovely, lovely thing." He pulled her close and kissed her on the forehead. "I'm proud of you, darlin'." His voice caught. "You look tonight so much like your dear mother all over again that I—that I—"

Marcy saw a tear gather in her father's eye and run like a glisten of mercury down the weathered cheek. Deeply touched, with her scrap of handkerchief she wiped it away. Gently she said, "Daddy, that's the nicest compliment I ever had. I've always remembered mother as the most beautiful woman I ever knew."

"Aye, she was that, mavourneen. It very nearly killed your dad when he lost her. Tonight I had the feeling she was born again. With only one difference—her hair was bright as new-minted gold, and yours is like the flame of a bonfire. Darlin', there's not a girl in San Francisco can hold a candle to you tonight."

"Sure and you kissed the Blarney Stone for certain," Marcy said, laughing. "Come, Daddy, let's finish this waltz."

As he put his arm around her and they dipped away, he

said, "So you'll take the chance of being stepped on by the boots of an ould construction stiff.i'

"Pouf! You're still lighter on your feet than most of the bhoyos."

"That might be for a dance or even two. Then the old leg I got on the Sedro Woolley job catches up with me. That means that after my duty dance with my lovely daughter, I'll relinquish you to the younger bucks."

Knowing how painfully that old injury bothered him at times, she said, "Dad, when you want to leave, go ahead. Aunt Dora has her cabriolet here. She'll take me home."

"Ah, that good, grand woman! I may take you up on that, but first I'll have a bite of supper. You stay and have fun, Marceline. This is your night, and I misdoubt that many a fine young gentleman will be besieging you for your favors."

Marcy laughed. "With all this competition? All these beautiful girls—Daddy, most of them will have dowries big enough to buy Tarrant Construction outright."

"The 'great families' don't impress you, though, daughter," he said. "You have the same clear insight your mither had, God rest her soul. Now you've stirred up my Irish sentimentality, baby. In the dark of night I often shed a tear for my lost Aimee, and the tiny baby brother you might have had, whom we lost with her." His arm tightened around her. "You remember how I tried to drown my sorrow in strong drink, but even the crayture couldn't ease me of it."

"Could I ever forget?" Marcy asked, gently. "I was one who had to take care of you when your men carried you home from the saloon. I'd help you to bed, and in the morning I'd fill the ice bag for your aching head, and brew coffee strong and black to make you fit again."

"Aye, and I bless you for it even now. For it was you who saved me in the end, though it took me three months to come to my senses. Then I gained more trust in my fine young daughter than I did in whiskey. Since then, even with all the ups and downs, we've had a good life, haven't we, mavourneen?"

"The best, Daddy. In this new century I hope things will be better still," she said. "Though I am hating the thought of going back clear across the country to Miss Spofford's, next week. I hear you need a good timekeeper on the Torreon job."

"Sure and I do, but it won't be you," he said, shaking his head. "Together with your Aunt Dora I intend to make a lady out of you, come hell or high water. I won't have it said

that redheaded Tarrant tomboy is such a simple slut she spells cat 'k-a-t.' "

She said with a trace of indignation, "Now Daddy, I may lack polish, but remember I can throw a surveyor's chain and drive a draft team ahead of a Mainey wheeler. I can figure the yardage in a cut, and know how to cap a dynamite fuse. I'm not completely stupid, you know."

He grinned at her. "There's few eighteen-nearly-nineteen-year-old girls you can't beat, honey. That doesn't mean there aren't a few things to be learned at yon female academy."

"Oh, it's not a waste of time—I'll give you that. Your rough diamond is gaining a bit of polish, and I've gained confidence in myself. But I'd sooner stay here with you."

"I wish you could, for you're not only my lovely red-haired colleen, but you're the son I lost, too. So I want you to be smart in everything. I want you to be able to stand up to the whole damn world, and spit in its eye if need be."

"That's Tough Tom Tarrant talking," she said. "I'll never let you down, Daddy."

"Now, now, mavourneen, that's taking in one hell of a lot of territory," he said. "Just leave a bit of margin for error, Marcy. You'll make your mistakes, as everyone does. You'll do some things you regret, some you're ashamed of. Be sure, then, to wring some profit from those mistakes, so next time around you'll know better. And no matter how hard you fall, get up again with your head high and tell yourself, 'The world is my oyster.' "

The music came to an end with Marcy smiling at her father's words, filing them away amid her secret memories.

CHAPTER II

As the Tarrants approached the tables in the dining room of the Nautilus Club, Tom Tarrant said to Marcy, "It's a good thing these tables are built of stout oak and seasoned maple. Else they would be sagging like the back of an ould brood mare. I am tempted to a light collation, and as for you, child, I know you are always hungry."

A waiter met them with his large silver tray, and followed them as they started at the end of a table marked by the ice sculpture of a grinning Eros. They piled the tray with Louisiana shrimp, Dungeness crab, Beluga caviar. There were oysters in a dozen styles, Virginia ham, roast beef, turkey and capon and squab, salads by the dozens, hot rolls. From these and a hundred other delicacies they filled the tray carried by the waiter, and looked for a place to eat.

Chalmers Laughlin came then. "Come join us," he said cordially enough. "We have a table by the window."

Marcy glanced at her father with a bit of misgiving, for Tom Tarrant had never been particularly friendly with this wealthy brother-in-law, who had a slightly patronizing air. Fortunately, tonight Tom Tarrant was in an expansive mood. "Most thoughtful of you, Cham," he said. "Our poor waiter man is about to cave in at the knees, and we have too many goodies to balance them on our laps."

They joined Claribel Laughlin, Dora and Patsy at the table. The waiter set down the various dishes, filled the champagne glasses, and departed.

"Wasn't the pageant marvelous?" Claribel gushed. "Weren't our lovelies gorgeous, Thomas?"

"Seems like I heard there were a dozen girls," Tom Tarrant said gallantly. "But my ould eyes could see only two, this tall colleen of mine, and pretty Patsy. When they stepped so bravely down that long stair, they looked so beautiful my heart turned over in my breast."

"And the honor, Thomas, for them to be chosen Nautilus Maidens!" Claribel cried. "So lovely. Marceline, that ivory

gown becomes you almost as well as her blue does my Patsy."

"Thank you, Aunt Claribel," Marcy said with deceptive meekness. She turned to the food on her plate to avoid further answer. Her uncle's wife was one of those women whose seeming vapidity concealed a native shrewdness. On occasion Claribel could wield a tongue as sharp as a surgeon's scalpel. Marcy had often retreated rather than cross swords with her aunt over inconsequential matters.

Now Claribel said, "Why, Marcy, you're not wearing your Nautilus pendant."

"Daddy has it in his pocket in its case," Marcy said. "I was afraid of breaking the chain. Besides, I think this lovely lavaliere Daddy gave me goes better with this gown." She noted that Patsy was wearing the silver pendant, with its tiny jeweled figure of Poseidon, which a Nautilus Maiden was expected to treasure forever.

"I agree, Marceline," her Aunt Dora said. "The medallion might be thought ostentatious with your sweetly simple gown." She caught Marcy's eye and smiled.

She winked at her spinster aunt, of whom she was most fond. Dora was the youngest of the three Laughlin children. Aimee, Marcy's mother, had been the oldest, with Chalmers in the middle. Dora was quite wealthy, for in addition to her holdings in the Laughlin estates, she had inherited a large amount from her late fiancé. Her wedding to Roddy Voden had been all arranged, when the groom, in an access of patriotic zeal, had volunteered for service with the Rough Riders. He had died of yellow fever in a Cuban hospital tent, leaving his not-inconsiderable fortune to Dora.

Though Dora was slim and pretty, Marcy thought she was unnecessarily resigned to spinsterhood. Dora filled her days with church work and other unpaid and often thankless jobs. She also supervised the Laughlin household, which left Claribel free for bridge whist and numerous well-publicized social organizations.

Chalmers Laughlin signaled a waiter, and the man refilled the champagne glasses. " 'S time for a toast," Chalmers declared. He stood up, weaving slightly. "To 1900 and a great new century!" he cried, raising his glass. It was plain that this was not the first toast Uncle Cham had indulged in tonight.

She finished her supper, half-listening to Claribel again recounting the triumphs of tonight, her joy and reflected

honor. She saw Tom Tarrant, with mild impatience, drop fork to empty plate and wipe his lips with his napkin. He stood up; leaning over, he kissed Marcy on the cheek.

"It's past the ould man's bedtime, mavourneen," he said. "So in departing, I wish everyone here, everyone in our fair city, kindness and peace and prosperity, and may our new century bring to us our heart's desire. Dora my dear, you'll see that my beautiful child gets home safely?"

"I'll see to it, Thomas," Dora said.

Chalmers Laughlin stood up also. His words a little slurred, he asked, "Would you do the same for our Patsy, Dora? Claribel and I have a hundred calls to make tomorrow; a hundred toasts to drink, a thousand little cookies to eat. So let us hie ourselves home and to bed, dear wife."

Marcy guessed that Claribel wanted very badly to stay. But on the other hand there was the danger that Cham might overdo the wine, and fall flat on his face in front of God and all the Nautilus Club. So Claribel gathered her belongings, gave Patsy a peck on the cheek, and took Chalmers' arm. She said, "So good of you, Dora dear. Patsy, try to get home by four, or we'll worry. Come, Cham, our bed will feel good after this long evening."

"Won't it, though," Chalmers said. Marcy intercepted the wink and the leer her uncle aimed at Tom Tarrant. She caught her breath in surprise. Her uncle's meaning was unmistakable. But why not? Claribel was still in her mid-forties, a full-fleshed woman. Yet Marcy had to suppress a smile—she hadn't guessed that Cham Laughlin. . . .

When the Laughlins had gone, Tom Tarrant touched his daughter's shoulder. "Don't look for me in the morning, mavourneen. I've got to go out to the Torreon job. The boys have hit a seam in the tunnel. We've got a deal more water than we know what to do with."

"You'll whip it, Daddy," Marcy said confidently. "You will get back Friday in time to see Patsy and me off?"

"Count on it," he said. "They'd have to break my leg to stop me."

Marcy watched the broad-shouldered figure cross the dining room and disappear. He must be worried about the Torreon project, a dam and hydroelectric plant. But Tom Tarrant had not permitted his worry to show, lest he throw a shadow over Marcy's evening.

Dora excused herself, and left to join older friends at another table. Marcy noticed that Patsy kept glancing at the

main entrance. Now at last Patsy sprang to her feet, waving her handkerchief. Her eyes were bright, her round pretty face smiling joyfully.

When the young man who came striding across the room was closer, Marcy felt her heart give a little lurch. For this was without doubt the handsomest male she had ever encountered. He was perhaps four or five years older than herself, tall, lean, with curly dark hair and laughing dark eyes. He was faultlessly dressed, his cutaway revealing the pristine starched shirt front with diamond studs, his trousers hanging perfectly, his patent-leather pumps sparkling darkly.

Patsy took the young man's arm. She said, "Marcy, may I present Paul Costain? Paul, this is my cousin, Marceline Tarrant. She was one of the Nautilus Maidens, too."

Paul Costain took Marcy's hand, his smile showing white teeth under a pencil-thin mustache. As he touched her, she felt an electric current flow through her fingers. She was filled with a strange excitement such as had never touched her before. She stared at him, knowing her mouth was open, knowing the crimson was rising in her cheeks.

"What an honor to be in the presence of not one but two of the famed Nautilus Maidens," he said, his tone light. He did not release Marcy's hand. "Sorry I missed the grand entrance, Pat. But one of my relatives, a partner in Costain *Frères,* is here from Paris. Dad was host to a small dinner party for him, command performance, you might say. Mother and Della did manage to get excused for their so special occasion, on the promise they would dash home afterward to join Dad's party. When they arrived, I scooted. Dull party, though we of Costain Brothers value and nurture our French connection."

"Your mother looked magnificent tonight," Marcy murmured.

Now reluctantly he released Marcy's hand, though his piercing eyes still probed hers. "Didn't she, though! My God, what a display the old girl put on! I told her she looked like a diamond chandelier, and not, for God's sake, to wear that stomacher. But she wouldn't listen to me; she flaunted her full regalia before San Francisco's elite. She's inordinately proud of her vaultful of shiny rocks."

"They were a little much," Patsy agreed.

"Much? She was overpowering. Didn't you think so, Miss Tarrant? Yet she may have been right, in our new Western society. We make wealth our god. The mater, I'm afraid,

lives by standards she acquired when her parents ran a sailor's boarding house in Alameda."

The mocking tone of his voice missed contempt by only a hair's breadth, which Marcy found hard to understand. Many of the elite of this exuberant city sprang from humble origins. Marcy's own father had been a cabin boy who jumped ship in the Bay thirty years before. Like others, he had sweated and strained, clawing his way up to wealth and a respected position. It would never occur to Marcy to scoff at her father for his humble beginnings.

So why, she wondered, did Paul Costain seem so severe in his attitude toward his mother? He was secure. Perhaps the French Costain in him made him wince at "our new Western society."

Paul was awaiting her comment expectantly. Deliberately misunderstanding his intent, she said, "Nice meeting you, Paul. I'll leave you and Patsy to your own devices. I have—things to do."

"Don't go far," he told her. "I'll dance with this little girl next door, then I'll claim a dance with you. Pat and I are like brother and sister, eh, Pat? Once I supervised her mud-pie factory, often I kidnapped her dolls. She got so furious she clouted me with her tin shovel and nearly broke my nose."

"And lordy, how it bled!" Patsy exclaimed, laughing. "Come, Paul, they're playing a one-step."

Marcy watched the two move away. Boy next door, perhaps, she thought, but to Patsy the friendship went much deeper than that. Her adoration of Paul Costain was obvious. Nor could Marcy blame Patsy; Paul was a marvelous specimen of man. Marcy realized Paul met all of Claribel's specifications for a husband for Patsy—looks, wealth, personality, social position, and perhaps more.

Disturbed by the way this man affected her, Marcy walked over to the window and looked out into the night. The Nautilus Club stood high atop Nob Hill. The view this clear crisp night was marvelous. Below, the street lights marched in lines along the downtown curbs, with Market slashing diagonally across them. With most of the revelers gone, there were few lights showing in the big business buildings. But north and east, under the looming pile of Telegraph Hill, the Barbary Coast and Chinatown were ablaze with light. The celebration would go on for days in

the resorts and bordellos on Dupont and Sansome, Pacific and Montgomery.

East, the arc lights glowed on some of the piers along East Street, where the work of the world went on, New Year's or no. A day lost in loading a ship meant money out of the shipper's pocket, and lost wages for the stevedores now sweating around the clock. Across the Bay was the cluster of lights that marked Alameda, and further to the north the lights of Oakland. An early ferry boat spun a phosphorescent wake as it moved in toward its slip at the Ferry Building, its lights giving it the look of a miniature ocean liner. Above it all a sliver of moon ducked in and out of the few ragged wisps of cloud.

She heard the spirited music of Gus Thalberg's orchestra stop, and she turned from the window to see Paul Costain escorting Patsy back to the table. Marcy's cousin looked happy and exhilirated, flushed with exercise and the unaccustomed wine. Paul seated her, and came directly to Marcy.

"My dance," he said. "I thought we'd have a two-step, but instead they're playing an old chestnut—'After the Ball.' With you, though," he smiled at her, "I understand you are an excellent dancer."

"I don't fall down much, at least," Marcy said, as they moved out to the polished parquetry floor.

As Marcy expected, Paul was a fine dancer. Her feet followed his without error, as if the two had been practicing together. Her rapport with Paul, from the first touch of his hand, became more real, more thrilling.

"I have a little plan, redhead," he said. "How would it strike you to watch the sun rise, from Telegraph Hill?"

"Without Patsy?" she asked.

"Without Patsy," he said, laughing. "Marcy, Patsy is just the little girl next door, and it's time she was home in her trundle bed. I was thinking of just you and me, Redhead."

"Not tonight, Paul, and don't call me 'Redhead.' Some other time, maybe. It has been a long and exciting day. I'd probably go to sleep as the sun came up."

"Then what d'you say about lunch tomorrow—today? Then dinner at night? And lunch and dinner the next day?"

"My, but aren't you the fast worker! Do you give all the girls a rush like this, including my pretty cousin?"

He held her off at arm's length, staring at her. He shook his head, and gathered her close again. "Marcy, kindly get

it out of your lovely head that I have a case on Patsy. She has no strings on me. She would do, I suppose, if a certain red-haired beauty hadn't cast a line that caught me"

"Ah, you poor fish!" Marcy exclaimed. She hesitated. "Paul, I'll only be here until Friday, then Pat and I must take the train to New Haven I have a million things to do."

"You think that's unique? I have a long list of things myself before I go back to Leland Stanford," he said. "I'm putting it all aside, though, while I try to make such an impression on your heart that you won't look at those Yale men this winter."

She laughed. "I'm sure you haven't met our Miss Spoff. She keeps a sharp eye on us girls. There are only three or four closely chaperoned events in all our academic year. I've met just three Yale men in the four months in New Haven. Two of them were perfect sticks."

"And the third?"

"Oh, he was something like you, only more handsome. He did have one serious fault."

"And that was?"

"A girl from Radcliffe had him sewed up. Most of our date was spent with his regaling me with her good looks and her accomplishments. Since a little of that goes a long way, I soon pleaded a headache and was taken home."

"What a silly ass that lad was!" Paul said. "I'm sure I won't be that gauche, Marcy, for I'm footloose and fancy-free. That is, until I met you this evening."

"The depth of your runaway sentiment intrigues me, sir," she said, dimpling. "Well, since you plead your case so expertly, I *will* go to lunch with you."

"Peachy!" he said. "I'll pick you up at one o'clock."

"You know where I live?"

"I surely do. Franklin near Washington. Not hard to remember those most patriotic names."

"How did you find out my address?"

He laughed at her. "Easiest thing in the world. I simply asked the girl next door."

He asked Patsy? Marcy said, "You shouldn't have done that, Paul. Did she resent it?"

"Why should she? I repeat again, redhead, she's practically a little sister to me. I know she silently adores me, but so do all the girls."

"What an egotist!" she said, as the music ended.

Later, in Aunt Dora's rubber-tired cabriolet, Marcy saw the

first dawn silver the Richmond Hills across the Bay. The carriage rolled west through empty, silent streets. The loom of the Marin County hills lay across the Golden Gate, and Marcy shivered, for gray wisps of cloud and fog were sliding across the Gate. To the west, the fog was a solid bank drifting landward.

In the seat beside Marcy, her Aunt Dora dozed and woke, dozed and woke. Patsy's dark head was in Dora's lap. Marcy herself was preternaturally awake. Looking at her sleeping cousin with an odd pity, she thought, *I hope I didn't hurt her too badly tonight. But Pat dear, this is out of my control.*

Marcy felt the zest of life singing through her veins. The Nautilus Ball already seemed days past. Only Paul Costain was real. That chiseled face, that brilliant smile were sharply etched in her memory, and his pleasant voice echoed in her ear. Marcy had always been popular enough, meeting her share of young men. But not one of them had come near affecting her as Paul had. She was excited at the very thought of having lunch with him today. . . .

Dora Laughlin's cabriolet pulled away from the Tarrant house as Marcy ran lightly up the steps. She closed the front door softly behind her. She made her quiet way up the carpeted stairs, but as she passed the partly open door of her father's room, a sleepy voice asked, "You're home safe and sound, mavourneen? Did you have a good time?"

"Marvelous, Daddy," she said. "I hope all the year is as joyous as the first day."

"Naught but good fortune can ever touch your lovely head," he said. "And never forget, darlin', that your ould dad loves you much and much."

"Much and much from me, too, Daddy," she said, repeating their favorite phrase from her childhood.

CHAPTER III

Marcy woke to broad daylight, a chill breeze fluttering the curtains at her open window. She stretched luxuriously, snuggling back into the comfort of the covers. She felt rested, full of life, plain wonderful. There was the sense of something very pleasant in store this day, so pleasant she was reluctant to analyze its promise. Then she glanced at the clock and was startled fully awake. In less than two hours she would see Paul! She leaped from bed and let her nightgown drop unheeded to the cold floor. Naked, she ran into her bathroom.

She was ready well ahead of the hour. She tried to conceal her eagerness when she heard the front doorbell chime, and Mary, the maid, call, "Miss Marcy, Mr. Costain is here for you."

"Be right down," Marcy cried. For propriety, she made herself wait a full thirty seconds before she came flying down the stairs.

As Paul took both her hands in his, Marcy drew a deep breath. He had been handsome in white tie and tails, but now in dark business suit, high collar and foulard cravat, he was beautiful! He exuded confidence.

"Hi, redhead," he said. "How do you feel today?"

"Wonderful, Paul. But I slept so late I skipped breakfast. I'm starved. Lunch for this hungry woman will wreck your budget."

He took her arm and they went down the outer steps. "I think I can get enough money. I say, it will be pleasant to buy lunch for a girl who wants to eat. Most of my lady friends merely toy with their grub. They're afraid of getting fat, I suppose."

"I'm lucky, then. I can eat like a stevedore."

The phaeton was waiting at the curb. He handed her in and took the seat beside her. The carriage top was up, and the footman closed the side curtains, for on this January day the air was damp and chill. The carriage rocked as the footman took his place beside the coachman, and the handsome

equipage started off without orders from Paul. The horses' hooves rang a sharp clip-clop on the pavement.

"We're going to a little place out on North Beach," Paul told her. "Fetterman's, it's called. Kind of a college hangout, a lot of us go there when we're in town. Not much for swank, but the food's great."

"Food for me," Marcy said, moving close to Paul. "Hang the swank." As she touched him she felt again that tingle of electricity. *Does he feel it too?* she wondered. *Perhaps, because he didn't move to avoid me.*

The hole-in-the-wall called Fetterman's served them a highly satisfactory lunch. Afterward Marcy couldn't remember what she had eaten, only that it was good. Several customers, men of Paul's age, made it a point to come to the table and be introduced to her, but so euphoric was her daze that the names which stayed in her mind were only Tom and Bill and Jack. Not one, she thought, was as handsome as Paul.

Marcy and Paul dawdled over dessert and coffee, until most of the lunch patrons were gone; talking, talking, making new discoveries, enthusiastic over new likings and shared preferences.

Afterward, as he hailed a hansom cab in front of the cafe, Paul said, "Of course you're having dinner with me tonight."

She looked at him, her cheeks pink in the chill of the slight drizzle. "Of course I am, Paul," she said softly. He squeezed her arm in approval as he helped her into the cab.

That was the first of three deliriously happy days. They dined at Ruffino's and the Fly Trap. They ate Dungeness crab, scarlet and delectable, straight from a boiling pot at Fisherman's Wharf. They took the ferry to Alameda and ate *scioppino* at the Bird Cage. On a brilliant but chilly day, they tried to picnic on the beach beyond Golden Gate Park, but the fog came rolling in. Before its icy fingers, they retreated to the Cliff House to dine sumptuously.

Paul would have liked to take Marcy to the Costain ranch down the Peninsula, but the time was too short. He said, "Come summer, you and I will ride to our hearts' content. And we'll go for long sails in my yawl, and fish the deep sea, and—oh, Marcy, we'll do a world of wonderful things."

In those few days, Marcy found Paul the near-perfect companion. They liked the same food, the same sports, and much the same humor. She encountered only one small area of difference, an attitude of Paul's. He treated servants and clerks and waiters, the ordinary people he came in contact

with, with a lack of regard Marcy found disturbing. He assuaged resentment by generous tipping, but to Marcy that did not cancel the arrogance of his actions. She supposed such a posture came with being born to great wealth. *Paul is sure that he is superior to the ordinary run of mankind,* Marcy thought. She was beginning to agree with him.

The day before Marcy was to leave for the East, she and Paul were lunching in the vast conservatory that was the dining room of the Palace Hotel. Placing his hand over hers, he said, "Our last day, redhead, until next summer. So I've planned a surprise for this evening, something different, exciting. Your father isn't home?"

She shook her head. "No, they're having tunnel problems on the Torreon project and he has to be there. He won't be home until tomorrow when he drives in to see me off. Why do you ask?"

"Because Tough Tom Tarrant might veto my fine plans. He'd assume the stand older people always do, that we callow youths can't take care of situations that might arise."

"Daddy's quite understanding, but if he didn't like what you were cooking up, he'd inform you, *muy pronto.*"

He looked at her speculatively. "I'm sure he would. But you're game, aren't you, Marcy?"

"Game for what?"

"To go slumming down around the Barbary Coast. There'll be two other couples—the men are college pals of mine. We'll take in the vaud at the Bella Union, and maybe a few of the other sights. Now listen, we can't look too ritzy, more middle class, you know. So wear something old, slightly dowdy. Maybe you could borrow an outfit from one of your servant girls. And of course, don't wear any jewelry."

"Of course not," Marcy said with veiled sarcasm. She was amused by his assumption that her wardrobe consisted only of new and glamorous garments. "The Bella Union is 'way down on Kearny, isn't it? I thought it was one of those infamous stag melodeons I've heard about."

"It was, and one of the oldest. But the Bella Union has fallen on hard times, so a new management is trying to revive it with family entertainment, vaudeville, melodrama, and such. I've heard the show is simply hilarious, especially when it's trying to be dead serious. It will be fun, so say yes, Marcy."

"I'll go with you," Marcy said without hesitation. She was no wide-eyed innocent. She had seen much of the seamy side

of life around the construction camps. The Micks and the Cousin Jacks, the Finns and Wops, the Svenskas and Bohunks who worked for Tarrant Construction were rough-grained men. When they came to town they caroused and gambled and fought. They got drunk and chased the women of the Barbary Coast. They sampled the fleshpots of the Uptown Tenderloin when they were in funds, and the big city was barely big enough to hold them. They would come back to the job broke and hungry and battered. Marcy would hear or overhear wild tales of what they had met in the seething vice districts. So Marcy had always had a secret ambition to observe at first hand some of the raw verities of such places.

"Should I bring my brass knuckles?" she asked.

Paul laughed. "You'll be safe enough, Red, with three strong gladiators to protect you. We won't stay late—we'll get out of there before the hullabaloo really starts busting out at the seams, around midnight. The thrill, redhead, is that something wicked *might* happen, though it probably won't."

"A little trip along the fringes of danger, to provide zest for dull lives, eh, Paul? What time tonight?"

"The other two men and I are going first to a stag dinner. I'll pick you up about eight. The shows at the Bella Union run continually."

Marcy had dinner at home that night in the kitchen with Mary Tupper, the maid, and Lulu Leghorn, the housekeeper. The two women, with Logan Cresap, the broken-down old teamster who was the Tarrants' man-of-all-work, made up the Tarrant household staff. To Marcy and her father they were family. Marcy knew her aunt, Claribel Laughlin, was horrified by Marcy's free and easy attitude toward her servants. Even the more tolerant Aunt Dora found Marcy's friendliness with the staff disturbing—such as Marcy permitting them to use the main stair instead of the servants' stair when they were in the front of the house! Marcy, brought up in a rough and ready world, was not disturbed, for she didn't see any reason to feel superior to these people who worked for wages.

At eight, when Paul escorted her down the steps to the waiting victoria, Marcy found they were joining two other couples. The two girls were Betty Stevens and Ingrid Johansen, perhaps a year or two older than Marcy. Betty was short, chubby and bubbly, Ingrid was tall, blonde, somewhat taciturn.

Their escorts, friends of Paul's from Leland Stanford Uni-

versity, were Bobby Locke, built like Marcy's father, and Jeb Hargis, tall, lean, with an acerbic manner.

All seemed in a festive mood. Marcy decided the three men had dined well, for they were talkative, their faces flushed, but not from the chill air. The men were dressed in worn clothes, though the effect of good fabric and fine tailoring could hardly be concealed. The two girls have missed the dowdy mark badly, Marcy thought, though they would be mortified to attend any social occasion in their outfits.

Marcy had put on an old tailored suit of which she was very fond and had not had the heart to discard, though it was badly worn. Her red hair was topped with a small felt hat in the mode of the late war days. From her maids she had borrowed a pair of worn, scuffed high-button shoes.

Ingrid looked Marcy up and down. She said, "Very goot. Ve all look like the harnessmaker's wife, out on one big spree." Hearing Ingrid's slight accent, Marcy remembered that Ingrid was one of the Johansens who had become important shipowners on this West Coast, with their Blue Star Line and Western Mail.

Betty Stevens preened in exaggerated style, touching the Psyche knot of her hair. She giggled. "Jeb, am I dowdy enough to work the Uptown Tenderloin?" she asked.

"Dear girl, you fall between two stools," Hargis drawled. "You're too sly for the Barbary Coast, but not swank enough for the Uptown. I hate to say this, but our ladies of the night from the Uptown Tenderloin would give you cards and spades and Little Casino. They're the most acclaimed courtesans this side of New Orleans."

"Well, I like that–" Betty pouted. "So I couldn't make the grade as a kept woman?"

"That depends on who your protector is," Hargis said, grinning. "Now I—but we won't go into that. I tell you, kid, those gals dress to the nines. It's only when they've lost their looks and their last lover that they slip down to the Barbary Coast bagnios."

"Bobby, didn't that babe you tried to smuggle into the Kappa Rho Ball come from the Tenderloin?" Paul asked.

Bobby Locke chuckled. "Yeah, but she looked like a lady, though she told me she was a dancer in a ballet troupe. How was I to know?"

"Because it cost you fifty smackers to have her pawn herself off on the Kappa Rhos," Hargis said. "I'll admit, Bob, it was a capital joke, and it damn near worked."

The carriage had reached the intersection of Clay and Grant. It pulled to the curb. The three couples piled out to the dimly lit sidewalk. Only a few furtive figures moved on this fringe of Chinatown.

"We'll walk from here, Cobb," Paul told the coachman. "Come back here at ten sharp, and wait. Beside Fenton here, you'd better bring Purley, too. I don't look for trouble, but this is a tough neighborhood."

"As you wish, sir," the coachman said imperturbably, and the victoria rolled away.

The three couples started down the street. Bobby Locke said, "Hey Paul, did you hear about the pug who is holding forth at McGroaty's? The Sydney Slasher, he calls himself. You put up a hundred, you last two rounds, you get it back plus fifty. And fifty more for every round you stay after that."

"He must think he's pretty good," Paul said, taking Marcy's arm as they came to a stretch of broken pavement. "You want to tackle him, Bobby?"

In the ring of light from a street lamp, Locke paused and assumed the classic position of the London prize ring, left arm and leg advanced stiffly, right fist held high. "It might be an easy way to pick up a hundred or so. I've had a bit of training in the manly art of self-defense, and—whuff! whuff! I might even knock the man out."

"You'd play hell, too," Hargis said disdainfully. "You've got to learn, young Locke, the difference between an amateur and an old pro. The Sydney Slasher may be no more than a tenth-rate fighter, but he's still expert enough to make catmeat out of you before you could holler 'Uncle!' "

Marcy felt Paul's hand tighten on her arm, and heard him chuckle. As they walked on down the street, the two men still bickering, Marcy could only agree with Jeb Hargis. She was reminded of her own experience of a few years before.

When she was a junior in the public high school near one of her father's construction jobs, a bully chose her for his prey and began making her life miserable. At first, using petty harassment, he went on to surreptitious minor torture. Finally he became bold enough to catch her alone and manhandle her in a clumsy attempt at rape. She broke away, but she had had enough and told her father, though before this she had been too proud to take her troubles to him.

When she finished her faltering explanation, Tom comforted her and said, "Mavourneen, let's give this spalpeen a

dose of his own medicine. If he gets licked by a girl—come, we're going to see Spike Naylor."

Spike Naylor was one of Tom Tarrant's compressor operators. But before that he had been welterweight champion of the Pacific Fleet, and the victor in a hundred waterfront brawls. All that summer, on weekends and off-hours, Spike Naylor worked with Marcy. He taught her not only how to defend herself, but all the fair and the dirty tricks of vanquishing any opponent with efficiency and dispatch. When she was starting to school again, Naylor told her, "Marcy, I'll guarantee you can take care of yourself in any company. The guy who tangles with you will think he's tackled a buzz saw. Just remember what I've taught you, and always, always get your licks in first."

Marcy's tormentor caught her just as school was out. To the applause of her classmates, in barely three minutes Marcy utterly destroyed the bully. Physically, she turned him into a bruised and bleeding hulk, and moreover broke his spirit. The next day he was the butt of the whole school. At the end of the week he left for good.

She smiled at the memory as the party walked through the cold, silent, dirty streets the short distance to Kearny and Washington. In front of the Bella Union, a sputtering arc lamp cast its purple light on street and building front.

"Wait here," Paul said. "I'll get the tickets. I'm not sure I can afford it, four bits each to get in, and another four bits for box seats."

When Paul had gone, Marcy asked a question of Jeb Hargis. It turned out that the young man was something of a student of San Francisco history. He told of the first Bella Union, a gambling house built on this site in 1849. Burned out, rebuilt in 1869, this Bella Union had lived through riot, fire, murder and mismanagement to the present, becoming one of the city's famous landmarks.

There were innumerable wild tales, Jeb said, about the characters who performed here, and the patrons who frequented the curtained booths. He added slyly that most of the stories weren't fit for the tender ears of ladies. The Bella Union had been the stamping ground of Red Foster, Deacon Jones, the Girl In Blue and Little Egypt. Here Billy Skeantlebury was shot to death. Oofty Goofty performed here, and on its stage Big Bertha played *Mazeppa*. She rode in from the wings with her two hundred and eighty pounds of nudity strapped on the back of a donkey, which presently fell over

the footlights into the orchestra, with disastrous results for all concerned.

Hargis had the others still laughing when Paul returned with the tickets. "Let's go," he said, taking Marcy's arm. "Stick close to me, redhead, or some mack will grab a pretty girl like you off to work a crib in Sansome Street."

Ingrid sniffed. "Don't be vulgar, Paul," she said.

Paul led them up a narrow stair to a booth at balcony level. Its dingy curtains could be drawn shut to insure the privacy of the occupants.

As they settled themselves into badly worn chairs, Hargis said, "In the halcyon days of this place, the 'pretty waiter girls' hustled drinks to the patrons of these boxes. If a well-heeled customer wanted to pull the curtains and stuff an extra fin into the top of a girl's lisle-thread bank, the management did not care. All they wanted was to sell more watered drinks."

Below, the stage curtain creaked closed on an act. Now a comedian came out in baggy pants, checked jacket, straw skimmer, carrying a bamboo cane. He launched into a monologue, his voice raucous, his jokes limp and tattered and blue. The scattered audience seemed to enjoy him, and gave him a spatter of applause when he finished. The Costain party added their lusty clapping to the acclaim. The comedian looked up toward the box, surprised that the group could be so enthusiastic over his worn routine. He raised his cane in salute as he shuffled off to the wings. As he disappeared, Marcy felt a sympathetic sadness. *He tried so hard,* she thought, *and he just hasn't got it. I wonder if he knows that.*

A seedy magician did two fine tricks and half fumbled three others. A boy and a girl sang a sweet but slightly untrue duet. Then they essayed the balcony scene from *Romeo and Juliet.* Marcy thought at first that it was a parody, then it came to her that the two young players were deadly serious. When the audience laughed, the two finally retired in mild confusion. A couple more threadbare acts followed, then the comedian came out again. Warmed by his earlier reception, he seemed quite sprightly, though these jokes were as threadbare as his earlier ones. At the end of the monologue he broke into a soft-shoe that Marcy found surprisingly deft and graceful. Touched, she led the round of applause from the box.

Strangely, Marcy enjoyed the show, though the players were inept, and some of the material offensive. She was sure these

people were either starting or finishing on this very bottom rung of the theatrical ladder.

Some of these players, Marcy thought, might one day rise high above the anonymity of the Bella Union, to some peak of stardom. So she was a little annoyed at Paul when she saw him flick open his hunting-case watch and check the time.

"Come on, gang," he said loudly. "I've seen all of this japery I want to."

"Sh-h-h, Paul," Marcy cautioned, gathering her purse, gloves, and coat.

But Paul did not lower his voice, and heads turned in disapproval of the disturbance. Marcy was glad when the party left the box and clumped down the dirty stairs into the dingy foyer, and left the Bella Union.

Outside, they found the mist had thickened. Marcy could see the faint plume of her expelled breath in the light of the street lamp. The men turned up their coat collars.

"Lordy, it's cold," Bobby Locke said. "Let's find your rig, Paul, and go somewhere we can find a hot drink and something to eat."

"Yes, it's about time we got out of this neighborhood," Paul agreed, taking Marcy's arm. "The Coast is coming to life, and the natives are growing restless. I don't like the look of some of them."

"Yet isn't that what we came down here to see?" Marcy asked pointedly. She sensed that Paul was beginning to have second thoughts about the wisdom of this expedition.

"You're right, of course, redhead, but I for one have seen enough," Paul said. He drew her aside as three sailors lurched past. "I didn't expect them to start crawling out of the woodwork so early. Those lads, for instance, will wake up tomorrow with empty pockets and aching heads."

"If they wake up at all," Jeb Hargis said cynically. "Come on, let's get a move on. I do believe this ain't any place for Mrs. Hargis' boy Jeb."

Paul led the way, with Marcy, toward the street where the Costain victoria should be waiting. Marcy bowed her head against the bite of the wind. They reached the street corner and turned, coming face to face with a trio which blocked the sidewalk, making no move to stand aside.

Seeing them, Marcy drew a quick breath. The big woman in the center was harsh of countenance and as drunk as a dissolute judge. She wore a tattered coat reaching her ankles. Her hat was a wreck, half its original flowers missing, those

remaining faded and broken. On one side of her was a dark-faced man with the look of a lascar seaman, on the other a bulky man with a scarred and twisted face. Both faces were hard and intemperate.

Paul said tersely, "Step aside and let us pass."

The woman rocked on her scuffed shoes. She took a long swig from the bottle she was carrying. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, leering malevolently at Paul and Marcy. She grunted something.

"Let us by, dammit!" Paul said, his voice curt.

The three did not move. Then the big woman hawked and spat on the sidewalk at Marcy's feet. A laugh rumbled from her throat, a laugh with no mirth in it.

"I take no orders from you—I know you and your kind. Slummers, eh? Come down to mock us simple souls of the Barbary Coast, come down to flaunt your fancy pussies in us poor folks' faces. God in heaven, you make me puke! I'd like to teach you a lesson, the lot of you, laughin' at people that's come on hard times. There was a time I was purtier than this little bitch with the henna hair, I tell you. It was swells like you, mister, that done me in and made me fit for nothin' but a red light house. 'Twas your kind made a whore out of me. For that you'll roast in hell in your own time. Even that's too far off—I got a good notion—by God I will teach your fancy gal a lesson she'll never forget, nor you either, mister."

"Damned if I'll stand for any more of this," Paul growled. He reached out to push the woman aside. The lascar snarled and leaned forward, his hand going to his belt under the ragged jacket.

From behind her, Marcy heard Ingrid's gasp. "Look out, he's pulling a gun!" Locke's voice cried, "Come on!" and Marcy heard the quick pound of footsteps recede up the side street. She did not dare look back, yet she was sure the four others were gone. A coldness not quite fright gripped her as she thought—*It's just you and me now, Paul.*

"Come, Paul, let it go," she said, holding her voice level. "We'll take the side street instead."

"Damned if I'll give in to these rascals!" he said angrily. "I've got as much right to this street as they have, and maybe a damned sight more. No vermin like these can block my way."

The big woman stood as solid as a granite block. She tipped her bottle again, draining it. Reaching over, she

smashed the bottom of it out against the bricks of the building. Broken glass tinkled as she gripped the jagged bottleneck in a grimy hand and advanced toward Marcy.

"Sister, that simpering face of yours makes me sick," she grated. "It's the kind that makes rich dudes like him want to paw you. So I'm gonna fix you good—if you try to peddle yourself to him or any other slob you'll have to do it in the dark. When I'm finished it'll make men sick to see you by daylight. Then you'll learn what I've went through in my rotten life."

Paul made a strangled sound deep in his throat. He stepped in front of Marcy, his fists raised. Without a word Scarface took two steps forward and slammed his left fist into Paul's belly. Then his right came across to Paul's jaw, the impact sounding like the dull thuck of a meat axe striking flesh. Paul crumpled at Marcy's feet as if all his bones had turned to water.

The temper that went with Marcy's red hair exploded. Spike Naylor's words echoed in her mind: "Kid, if you get in a tight spot, forget all this fairness bunk—hit the other guy first, hit him as hard as you can, anywhere you can." All this in the fraction of a second.

The woman was lunging at her. Instead of retreating, Marcy thrust toward her, twisting aside. Like a steel spring uncoiling, she smashed a punch into the woman's throat, just as cloth ripped and a hot sting of pain burned along Marcy's thigh. Anger flaming, Marcy made no attempt to cushion the older woman as she crumpled like a falling tree, gagging. She drove the pointed toe of her shoe into the angle of the woman's wrinkled jaw. The woman went limp.

She faced the two men, not retreating an inch. She met the stare of the dark man, who looked at her with blank unfathomable eyes. After a moment, his glance flicked down at the prostrate body of the big woman. And as if dis-associating himself from this affair, without a word he turned away. He stepped from the curb and crossed the street, never looking back.

The scar-faced man looked from Marcy to the woman and back again. The tip of his tongue touched his dry puffed lips. His face mirrored utter disbelief as he said in a voice like crushed gravel, "I swear I wouldn't believe it 'less'n I seen it! My God, miss, the way you wrecked Mean Molly, and so quick. A slip of a gel like you—me hat's off to you, miss." Astonishingly, a gnarled hand reached out and shook Marcy's.

"Sorry I hadda hit yer feller so hard, but he ast fer it. Want me to give you a hand with him?"

"Please," Marcy said, kneeling beside Paul. He was moaning a little, his limbs twitching. The scar-faced man lifted Paul to a sitting position. While Marcy supported the lax body, the man massaged Paul's neck and throat. Then he slapped Paul lightly on either cheek. "Old ring trick," he said. He boosted Paul to his feet. Paul leaned against Marcy, muttering something, his eyes open but not quite focused.

The scar-faced man looked about them at the dozen or so people who had gathered, their faces sinister and unfriendly. He said, "Best get this lad out of here, miss. This ain't no decent place for anybody after dark, and that's a gut."

Marcy could feel the life beginning to flow back into Paul's strong athlete's body. She pulled at him to lead him away.

"Thank you, sir," she told the scar-faced man. She pointed at the big woman, who was moaning a little. "But what about her? I may have hurt her badly."

He chuckled, the sound like two stones rubbing together. "Don't worry your red head about her, miss. It would take a sledgehammer to hurt Mean Molly. She fell down drunk in front of a brewery dray one time, and the dray busted a wheel and spilled steam beer all over the street. You just run along, sweetie, and drag your feller with you. But lemme give you a word of damn good advice from Dirty Dan Mullane. I says, never go slummin' on the Barbary Coast agin. You hear me?"

"I'll remember, and thank you, Dan," Marcy said, and gave him the friendliest of smiles. She touched him lightly on the shoulder in a gesture of understanding. Then she led Paul away through the opening in the crowd the scar-faced man forged for her.

She and Paul were a block away, when partly revived by the sharp night air, Paul asked, "Wha'—wha' happened?"

"A little trouble, Paul, but it's all right now," she said. "Hurry along and we'll find your carriage."

The Costain victoria was waiting at the appointed spot, in the dim light. As the two footmen clambered down, Paul said softly to Marcy, "Don't say anything in front of the servants." She nodded, though the three men must have been aware of something amiss, with Paul's unsteadiness and his disheveled appearance. Still, they were too discreet to inquire. They helped Marcy into the vehicle.

One foot on the carriage step, Paul said, "Cobb, I'm not

going home for a while. Take us to my flat on Sacramento. Then you can go back to the house and all three knock off for the night. I'll hail a cab when I want to leave."

"Very good, sir," the coachman said discreetly.

Paul scrambled in, and the carriage rattled westward. Marcy's fingers explored the ripped cloth of her skirt, and found it was torn diagonally from waist to hip by Mean Molly's glass dagger. Now her fingers found a sticky wetness along her thigh. She waited until the victoria rolled past a street lamp to examine her fingers. They were stained a blackish red.

My God, she did cut me! Marcy thought. She scrubbed furiously at her fingers with her handkerchief. She held the stained linen over the torn place in her skirt, and twisted her torso carefully. She squirmed, moving her hip. With a sigh of relief, she decided from the lack of pain her wound was superficial. The wave of faintness which had come over her passed. But she was in a pickle just the same, she thought. Clothes torn, and blood—Mary or Lulu would report it to her father and he'd be all upset. He mustn't know—she found a solution, a rather daring one.

"Paul, that woman tore my skirt," she said. "May I come up to your flat and make repairs?"

"Sure, that's where we're headed," he said, his voice again strong and natural. "That will give me a chance to grill you until I find out what happened back there."

"Oh, I'll tell you. But Paul, shouldn't we search for Betty and Ingrid and the two boys?"

"You know what happened to them?"

"When things started getting tense, they were afraid there was going to be gunplay. They hurried away up the side street."

"Then the hell with them. They can shift for themselves," Paul said harshly. "They ran out on me when I needed help. They've got some mighty complicated explaining to do."

The carriage pulled to the curb and stopped. The footman Purley opened the door and Paul handed Marcy to the sidewalk. The two stood in the chill wind that swept up Sacramento Street as Cobb clucked to his team, sending the victoria rolling away into the mists. Paul took Marcy's arm and turned her toward the arched doorway of the apartment building.

CHAPTER IV

Marcy and Paul climbed the dim stairway to the second floor. He fumbled for his keys in the dim light of the hall's single gas jet. From somewhere Marcy could hear the poignant strains of Dvorak's "Going Home" theme from his "New World Symphony". Paul's key rattled in the lock, he cursed under his breath, and then the door came open. He stood aside to let Marcy enter.

The flat was large, and comfortably though not lavishly furnished. A steam radiator hissed against a wall, and Marcy went to it, absorbing its heat, welcome after the chill of the street. As Paul pulled the curtains closed, Marcy could smell the stale tobacco smoke that lingered in them. Now he snapped switches and electric lamps sprang into light. The fixtures were those combinations of gas and electricity that had been widely installed before electric service had gained wide confidence.

"I just use these digs when I'm in the city," he explained. "When it gets so I can't stand that marble tomb of ours on Nob Hill a minute longer, I hole up here. I find my mater becomes quite overwhelming after I've spent a day or two in her company."

Soaking up the heat of the radiator, Marcy said, "It must be expensive to keep this place just for the few times you are up from Stanford."

He laughed, quite normal now. "The joint's rent-free. Our bank owns the building. Marcy darling, would you mind if I cleaned the grime of the slums from my fair body? Or would you like the bathroom first?"

"Go ahead, Paul. I'll wait my turn," she said, wanting time to do her repair work. "D'you have needle and thread around here somewhere?"

"Try the sideboard," he said. "It's a catch-all for almost everything."

Marcy began rummaging in the cluttered drawers of the mahogany sideboard. She could hear Paul moving about in the far bedroom. A door closed, a toilet flushed, water ran. She

heard the hissing drum of a shower. Faintly, she could hear the tune Paul hummed as he bathed.

In the third drawer she found needle and thread. She sat down, her torn jacket across her lap. With quick short stitches she gathered the small tear, thankful that Paul had advised old clothes. She put the jacket aside and examined the skirt. That twist of her body had saved her from a full impact of the lance of glass, but still the skirt had suffered an eight-inch rip below the hipbone. There was a stain of blood along the tear, nearly dry. She guessed that her petticoat and underdrawers must have absorbed most of the blood, so they would be something of a mess. She whipped the rent closed.

She put needle and thread aside as Paul came from the bedroom. He was wearing a handsome plaid dressing gown with satin lapels, his shins bare above calfskin slippers. His hair gleamed, wavier from dampness. He was so handsome—no, beautiful; her heart leaped at the sight of him.

Looking down at her, he rubbed his jaw. A blue puffiness marked the spot where Dirty Dan Mullane had hit him. He said, "Excuse the dishabille, darling, but after wallowing in the filth of a Barbary Coast street. . . . God! but that rascal had a wicked punch!"

"He hit you when you weren't expecting it," she said loyally, knowing her words weren't quite true. "Paul, may I use your bathroom now?"

"Of course," he said, and led her to the bedroom. From a closet he took a woman's robe of blue velvet. "Here you are, though it may be a bit large. Uh—one of my sisters left it when she borrowed my flat a while back. Marcy, you'll find towels in the cabinet, and I think you'll locate powders, creams, the other feminine necessities, in the medicine cabinet."

She took the robe over her arm, catching the odor of expensive perfume. She smiled at Paul and went into the bathroom, closing the door.

Undressing, she found her underclothes dappled with blood. The slash down her thigh was not deep, more a scratch than a cut. Ugly enough, but no longer bleeding She took a quick bath, toweled herself, and found a bottle of hydrogen peroxide in the medicine cabinet. She poured peroxide into the cut and patted it dry, deciding it didn't need a bandage.

Drawing cold water into the basin, she scrubbed her underthings. She managed to clear up the stains, thinking all the while of what Mary Tupper or Lulu Leghorn would have

thought if they had found blood-stained garments in the laundry. She spread the wet garments on the edge of the tub to dry.

Refreshed now and calm of mind, Marcy belted the borrowed robe around her slim figure. She walked barefoot through the bedroom into the living room. With a bit of surprise, she saw that Paul was still in robe and slippers, peacefully smoking a pipe. Quite the picture of the master of the house, she thought, smiling at him.

"I had to do some laundry," she explained. "As soon as the clothes dry I'll get dressed and go home."

"Fine—you'll have more time to spend in my company," he said. "Time for me to get at the truth of what really happened on that street corner. Say, Redhead, you look like a little girl in that outfit. But whatever your role in that street brawl, I'm betting it wasn't child's play."

She sat down beside him on the divan. As their shoulders touched, the nearness of him gave her a warm glow. She thought she might look young, but *that* wasn't a little-girl sensation.

She said, "Paul, it was brave of you to step between me and those ruffians."

"But pretty foolhardy, as it turned out," he said, shaking his head. "That lad's fist was like the kick of a mule. I was out cold until I felt fingers massaging my neck, then someone helping me to my feet. I seem to recall that big witch lying on the sidewalk, but how she got there. . . . Next minute you were leading me through a crowd of freaks who looked as if they had come out of Dante's *Inferno*."

Marcy was sure Paul would probe until she told him the truth, so she took the plunge and told briefly how she came by her boxing skills and how she vanquished Mean Molly, how the lascar faded away and Dirty Dan gave her a hand.

"Good God, Marcy! What a valiant woman you are! And Bobby or Jeb—those cowards! Now give me the rest of it."

"He gave you an awful bruise," she said, all sympathy, as though none of it could be Paul's fault.

"I think my pride was hurt as much as my jaw," Paul said. "Marcy, you're simply tremendous. We must have a toast to your victory."

He went to the sideboard, and from a cut-glass decanter he poured two glasses of brandy. He handed one to Marcy, the golden liquor glinting in the glass. "To Marceline Tarrant, not

only beautiful, redhaired, but possessed of remarkable talents, who rescued me from the consequences of a stupid idea."

They sipped the brandy, talking softly. She told him something of the construction camps, of Spike Naylor, and the discomfiture of the school bully. He talked of Stanford, and baseball, and the hunter, a great horse imported from Ireland, which he was training down at the ranch.

The cares of her world seemed to drop away from Marcy. With Paul she was utterly content. Her only regret was that she must leave him tomorrow, for five long months.

Suddenly Paul straightened and set his glass down on the table. He seized Marcy by the shoulders. "Dammit, redhead, it came to me suddenly that I'm still being stupid. That Mean Molly and her broken bottle—you're sure she didn't hurt you?"

"She was out to maim me, but only a single point of glass touched me, slashed my jacket and skirt. Fortunately, I'm a tough one," she said, laughing in deprecation.

"You're sure you're unhurt? Marcy, a doctor. . . ."

"Paul, don't be an alarmist. It's just a scratch."

"Just a scratch! Marcy, you could bleed to death, you could get blood poisoning. We must get you to a doctor."

"Oh, Paul, Paul! I appreciate your concern, but it is only a scratch, and I've doused it liberally with peroxide."

"I don't believe you," he said with a worried frown.

"Then I'll show you," she said. Daringly, she let the folds of her ample robe fall open to reveal the long red wale on the ivory skin of her thigh. "See, it isn't even bleeding."

He looked at the wound, then impulsively, he leaned down and kissed the smooth skin. "That will make it well," he said. His arms went around her, almost cruelly tight. "Marcy, if anything had happened to your beautiful body through my stupidity, I'd never have forgiven myself. In these few wonderful days we've had—well, I'm torn in pieces by the thought of you leaving me tomorrow."

She cupped her palms around his face. "Only for five months, dear one," she said gently. "I'll write often, and I hope you will too—about the coming summer, and the lovely plans we'll make for it."

"Summer! Only God knows what summer may bring. It's the *now* that has set me ablaze with longing Marcy, I've never had anything or anyone fill me with such intense longing. Marcy, I want you."

His lips met hers, and in that flaming kiss Marcy's world

melted away. In all the universe there was only her and Paul. Desire swelled in her and her firm young breasts rose against him.

His lips still passionately on hers, Paul let his hand drift to the folds of her robe and open them. She felt his insistent palm warm on her bare thigh. The hand moved to the smooth swell of her belly. Without volition, her legs parted, and she lay back on the divan, impatient, shaken by the overpowering urgency that possessed her.

Paul stood up and discarded the plaid robe. As he stood naked, she was not shocked by his male nudity. She took delight in the muscular perfection of his fine body; *like an Apollo by Praxiteles,* she thought. She reached up and pulled him down against her, feeling the smooth strength of him pressing against her taut breasts.

Now her thighs spread wider. She felt the strangeness of his intruding penis, rigid as a bar of iron as it entered her. There was a brief stab of pain, then that vanished in a wave of ecstasy.

Like a spinning helix, her joy mounted up and up. The divan, the room, the very world seemed to shake. Now Paul brought her soaring higher until everything exploded like a rocket. As the peak of fulfillment slowly receded, Marcy heard someone moaning softly, and was surprised to realize it was herself.

Much later Paul donned his robe again and brought two glasses of brandy from the sideboard. Marcy sat up. She gathered her dressing gown around her and took the brandy. He stood above her, sipping his drink, smiling fondly. His eyes were soft and warm as he asked, "Again, Marcy?"

She shook her head. "It was wonderful, Paul, it was perfect. But if we don't stop I'll never leave. Oh, if we weren't being parted tomorrow—"

He knelt beside her, kissing her hair and face. "Five months will be interminable," he whispered. "Write often, darling, tell me everything you are doing. Tell me about the men you see, so I can be madly jealous of them."

"You too, Paul, write about all the pretty girls you wine and dine, and whisper sweet nothings to."

"I'll try—to write, I mean. But I'm a damned poor correspondent, I'm afraid. Runs in the family."

She patted his cheek. "But Paul, you will tell me what delightful plans you will be making for our summer?"

"That I will do. And I'll cross the Bay tomorrow to see

darling. I must get dressed and go home now. After all, five months isn't too long a time. It will speed by like a through train."

"It will crawl, it will be a millennium, a life sentence," he grumbled. "But every day of it, Marcy darling, remember that I'm pining away because I love you so."

"You'll survive," she said, laughing. But as he kissed her long and hard, she felt that urgency rising again so she had to thrust him away and hurry to the bathroom to dress.

you off, I promise. Marcy, you'll be surrounded by a covey of relatives and friends. Let's—let's say our goodbye right now, right here."

Reluctantly, she shook off his restraining hand and stood up. "There must be an end even to the best of things,

CHAPTER V

Coming slowly awake, Marcy could see the winter sun well up beyond her bedroom window. She lay still in the pleasant warmth of her bed, letting thought flood in upon her. She smiled, remembering the delicious thrill of Paul's passionate kiss when he had brought her home some time after midnight in a hansom cab.

All of Paul's behavior might have been criticized. Taking a nice girl to the Barbary Coast, trying to battle toughs, seducing—she laughed lightly. She had needed little seducing. Was she a bad woman? It all seemed to have left her remorseless. Was this the shanty Irish of her? Her family hated that term and thought themselves above what it meant, but still—they were a tough lot, really.

What a wonderful week this has been! I've changed in these few days from a naïve schoolgirl into a true woman, she reflected. I've been taught what love is, taught the ecstasy of a man and a woman giving themselves freely to each other in the ultimate act of love. While the Nautilus Ball has faded into dimness, I'll never forget how it opened the doors of life for me.

Yet Marcy was finding darker thoughts under that feeling of opened horizons, those revelations of love's delights. She shivered a little, moving her head restlessly on the pillow. She'd changed physically too, she thought. She was no longer a virgin. Last night it had seemed not to matter that what they were doing was illicit and irreversible. But this morning—

She bit her lip, frowning. Her father must *never* know of this affair with Paul. Tom Tarrant was more liberal than most parents, she was sure. Yet would he forgive a daughter for throwing away her virginity with a man she hardly knew?

She would never forget her father's reaction years ago when Lucy Bedloe, the daughter of the carpenter foreman, got herself in trouble by Monty Selig, the shovel runner. When one day Selig, handsome, devil-may-care, abruptly drew his time and was gone, Lucy threatened to throw herself into

the river. Tom Tarrant had taken Lucy into his office. A half-hour later, Marcy saw the girl come out, wan but able to smile.

Tom Tarrant had explained to his anxious daughter the solution. "I told the lass we'd see her through, yet keep Buck Bedloe from hearing the truth of it," he'd said, his face grim. "I've given her money to go up to the city to await her time. She'll go to a proper hospital to have her brat, then we'll keep on helping her until she's on her feet again. Mavourneen, why do these little fools fall for a man's blandanderin'? They get themselves in the family way by some ne'er-do-well, like a bitch in heat in a dirty alley."

Tarrant talked that way alone with his daughter. Did Cham Laughlin ever mention bitches in heat in dirty alleys to Patsy? Marcy decided that her uncle never did.

"This when 'tis no great feat for any girl to flimflam a horny young buck into a mood where he'll stand before the dominie to make it all legitimate," Tom had gone on. "Yet a young idiot like our Lucy turns dumb and blind, to give herself to the first sweet-talking Lothario who pats her plump behind. Marceline Tarrant, don't ever let me catch ye in such a pickle or I'll—but you've got too much sense for that, thank God."

Do I? Marcy wondered. Then she caught her breath as a twinge of fear stung her. Last night—would it bring her to the same pass as Lucy Bedloe? What are the chances? Marcy felt helpless in her ignorance of sexual matters. She had taken the one course at Miss Spofford's Academy which touched on such matters. But the course had been so vaguely allusive, so much hurried over by the spinster who taught it, that Marcy had learned little from it.

What if she did become pregnant? The hurt to her father would be hardest to bear. Such goings-on could be forgiven in a working girl like Lucy Bedloe. But Tom Tarrant's own daughter. . . .

If Paul's seed had impregnated her last night, Marcy did not doubt she would face shame and censure by the Laughlins and the Costains and everyone she knew. In the face of that, what would Paul do? Marcy drew a deep breath. *Paul is a gentleman,* she thought. *He will surely do the right thing, if it comes to such a desperate pass.* Their talk all the past week had been of love undying. Paul would accept marriage, she was certain. Still, her nagging doubt. . . .

A soft rap on the door. "Time to rise and shine, Miss

Marcy. Your papa will be here at three, and your train leaves at six."

"Thank you, Lulu. I'm up," Marcy called, and hurried to her shower, glad to put aside those misgivings for the moment.

That evening, Marcy kept searching the crowd that had gathered at the railway station in Oakland, across the Bay. The people had come to see Marcy and her cousin Patsy Laughlin off for New Haven. But among them she did not find Paul, though he had promised to come.

Dora Laughlin came to Marcy, and surreptitiously gave her a slim book. "Put this in your purse," Dora whispered, with a sideward glance at Claribel, who was bustling about importantly. "It's *Poems: Third Series* by Emily Dickinson. You'll find it lovely, but the poems are *very* advanced."

"You're so thoughtful, Aunt Dora. Thank you," Marcy said, leaning down to kiss the dear creature. As Dora turned away to rejoin Patsy, Marcy went to her father, who was talking business with Chalmers Laughlin, ignoring the bustle of relatives. Tom Tarrant put his arms about his daughter's shoulders, and went on talking.

Again Marcy searched the crowd, disappointed and growing a little angry. For Paul's beguilement, she had worn her most handsome traveling dress, gray gabardine with large silver buttons, a gray cape trimmed with squirrel, and a perky small hat with a tiny green plume.

She saw her father staring past her. He said, "Mavourneen, I never saw so many posies as there are in your stateroom since the last time I went to an Eyetalian funeral. And I believe that here comes the young man responsible for that floral Niagara."

Marcy whirled. Paul Costain was approaching, smiling. She noted that one side of his jaw was heavily powdered, almost concealing a dark bruise, his souvenir of last night's encounter with Dirty Dan Mullane.

After shaking hands with Tom Tarrant and Cham Laughlin, Paul said to Marcy, "I had to raid half the florists in the city to give you a proper send-off. I hope you like the display."

She caught his hand in her gloved grasp. "Let's go look, Paul. I'll be back in a minute, Daddy."

She and Paul raced up the car steps and down the aisle to the stateroom. He opened the door and the scent of flowers was almost overpowering. The room was filled with roses

and chrysanthemums, carnations, lilies and other varieties, in vases and baskets and arrangements.

"Oh, Paul, it's beautiful!" Marcy exclaimed.

From his pocket he removed a small box. Opening it, he took out a gorgeous, delicate orchid and pinned it carefully to the lapel of her gray traveling dress. Then he pulled her to him and kissed her hungrily, long and passionately. When he released her, she was breathless.

"Oh, Paul, you're such a dear, I simply can't stand leaving you!" she wailed, feeling warm tears sting her eyelids.

"It won't be forever, dear one," he said. He tried to draw her close again, but she held him off.

"Paul, about last night—" she said, looking into his eyes. "Do you think—Paul, I'm worried."

"Nothing will happen, baby," he said confidently. "No need to fret about it. You'll be all right."

"I—I hope so," she said uncertainly. "But Paul, if—if something should happen, will you—I mean—"

His arm tightened. "It won't, but in the remote case that it does, we'll see that everything comes out all right. So come along now, I'd better get off. It's almost departure time."

On the platform, she and Paul chatted inconsequentially with Tom Tarrant and Cham Laughlin until the conductor, standing by the Pullman steps, glanced ostentatiously at his watch.

"Better get on board, mavourneen," Tom Tarrant said, and gave Marcy a quick hug and kiss.

Ignoring the crowd, Paul took Marcy into his arms, and kissed her long and hard. When he released her at last, she whispered, "I'll write, and you do, too. Paul, I love you."

He gave her that indulgent smile, and handed her up the car steps as the blue-uniformed conductor called, "Bo-o-o-ard!"

Marcy, with Patsy following, hurried down the aisle to their stateroom. Ignoring the clutter inside, they rushed to the windows. Noses pressed against the glass, they waved frantic goodbyes. When the train began to move, Marcy's last memory as the station platform and its occupants dropped behind was of Paul smiling and waving. Tom Tarrant stood just behind him, looking bereft.

As the train left the city and rolled through the flatlands toward Sacramento, Patsy said "Marce, look at the flowers. They must have cost a fortune." She began reading the cards on the sprays and baskets and wreaths that filled the

room with splashing colors and overpowering scent. There was a huge box of candy, and a cooler with an iced bottle of *Veuve Clicquot*. Patsy opened the candy and munched on a bonbon as she continued to read the names of the donors. She was not nearly through when she turned away and flung herself, frowning, on the windowseat. Marcy looked down at her, the effectiveness of her cousin's pout marred by a fleck of chocolate on the full red lips.

"What's the matter, Pat?" Marcy asked.

"You know darn well what's the matter!" Patsy cried. "The cards—'From Paul to Marcy,' 'To Marcy with love, Paul,' and a lot of other gooey sentiments. You know in that cheating heart of yours, Marceline Tarrant, that you're a traitor and a pirate. You stole Paul from me at the Nautilus Ball. And I know how you haven't let him out of your clutches since, I'm not dumb, you know. I saw how he kissed you just now, too. You're—you're just a snake in the grass, and cousin or not, I just hate you!"

Marcy had been dreading this. She sat down beside the younger girl and took the small sticky hand. She said, "Pat, please listen to me. I know you love Paul, and he loves you. But that love is like the love of a brother for a sister. It's not romantic love, and sad to say, there's no way to change that. You know Paul, probably better than I do. You know he's his own master, always. He gives orders, he doesn't take them. And darn him, I love him too. Yet I hope you won't let this stand between us. For five whole months you and I will have only each other for family. Remember we've been almost as close as sisters. Please don't be mad at me, baby."

Patsy was quietly thoughtful for a long time. Then as the sun breaks through a bank of clouds, that winning smile of hers came out. She squeezed Marcy's hand. "You're right, of course, Marcy dear. It's not your fault, it's Paul's, drat him. So I'm going to try to put him behind me for those five months." Her round face softened. "Though I'm sure I can never stop thinking of him."

"Nor I," Marcy echoed under her breath.

In New Haven, snow and cold greeted them. The hansom cab which took them the several miles from the depot to Miss Spofford's Academy crunched and rumbled over the icy streets. The curbs were piled high with drifted or shoveled snow. The bleakness of New England, after the more gentle climate of California, dulled Marcy's spirit.

Her depression lifted as she entered the rather handsome dormitory at the Academy. She heard the clack of girlish chatter, the thrumming of a distant piano. That evening after dinner, many of the girls gathered in the common room. They regaled each other with vacation adventures and romantic triumphs. Pure invention, Marcy thought, most of it. Or was it? She surely hadn't invented that glamorous week of hers, so maybe a lot of that was true.

So she listened with open heart, sympathized with the disappointments, laughed at the clowns as they capered. She applauded Patsy's triumph as she described the Nautilus Ball, and the part she and Marcy had played. She capped her description by passing around her Nautilus Maiden pendant for the girls to admire.

Settling back into the routine of classes, study, and friendly company was less prisonlike than Marcy had anticipated. Life at Miss Spofford's was strictly regimented and cloistered but it did help concentration. She put away thoughts of Paul except for nostalgic moments when she was writing to him. She kept busy enough, with her flair for languages working hard on advanced French, second-year German, and basic Italian. The latter she chose because San Francisco had a large Italian population, a fertile field for her practice in the coming summer.

As January waned, Marcy found herself wakeful and worried. She suffered in silence, looking often at her calendar. Then, on the precise morning, she felt familiar mild cramps. She welcomed them with joy.

It's not that I'm afraid to bear Paul's child, she told herself, *but suppose the poor thing had to go through life branded with the term "bastard"?*

Then she shook her head fiercely. The Tarrant candor asserted itself. *Marceline Tarrant, you're a hypocrite!* she thought. *You're so happy you're not having a child you could dance a jig! Enough of your high-sounding philosophy.* Having chastened herself, Marcy felt better.

Patsy's coolness over Paul had vanished. She had fun on the occasional sleighing or skating parties. She suffered through a crush on the new history instructor, another on the young doctor who ministered to the girls' coughs and colds and menstrual problems, and another on the farm lad who, twice a week, brought the school's milk supply. None of these proved serious. The only indication Marcy had that Patsy's hurt over Paul remained was that Patsy never dis-

cussed Paul, and if Marcy brought his name up, Patsy ignored it.

Though her study schedule was heavy, Marcy tried to write Paul once a week. She didn't always succeed, for though the languages were easy, she was having a struggle with science and trigonometry. Moreover, Miss Spofford's Academy had gone all out for the new game of basketball, invented a few years before by a young gym instructor at Springfield College, James Naismith. Marcy, with her strong, lithe body and fine coordination, became a mainstay of the six-girl varsity team. She enjoyed the game, meeting girls from other schools, and the chance to keep physically fit.

Basketball gave her something she thought would interest Paul. She tried to keep her letters discreet, for she did not know who might read them. Though the good Lord knew, she thought, little enough happened in a girl's boarding school to interest a virile young man like Paul. So since he was an athlete, she filled her letters with basketball. She was sure he did not care if Carrie Pflommer and Greta Littlefield got into a hair-pulling match and were both nearly expelled. Or that—

Her February letter she sealed with a tiny red heart, though she doubted if Paul would even remember to send her a card for St. Valentine's Day. By now she was resigned to the truism that he was, as he said, "a damned poor correspondent." One long letter, two short ones, a postcard from Malibu. She treasured these, carefully worded though they were. She knew he too was being discreet, but his caution left his letters empty.

The days slipped by, and the winter months. Now the sterile and boring atmosphere of Miss Spofford's began to buzz with mild excitement over the spring dance. It was one of the several closely chaperoned galas which Miss Spofford sponsored during the school year. Even a strict disciplinarian like "Miss Spoff" recognized that these lively, nubile girls must blow off steam or they might be climbing the ivied walls, or running off with the butcher boy.

"I'm on the decorating committee, Marce," Patsy confided. "Paper streamers, cutout daffodils and tulips, cardboard bunnies. Golly, when I think back to the Nautilus Ball, this party looks pretty tame."

"Oh, come, Pat, you'll have fun," Marcy said. "Miss Spoff will dragoon some of the older boys from the Wickham Square School, and some of the girls might persuade their

older brothers. A few Yale men, maybe, and some pipe-smoking ancients down from Harvard and M.I.T."

"You really think so, Marce? I couldn't *stand* it if the only males were those runny-nosed boys from Wickham. I wish Miss Spoff would let us ask our own dates. I don't see why not." Patsy flung herself on the bed, kicking her feet, and revealing a disgraceful length of silk-clad leg.

"Because our wise headmistress knows too well the danger of bringing together ardent young girls and excitable young men beyond her jurisdiction," Marcy said. "It's spring, Pat, my dear, the rutting season, the time when we young people get the strangest urge to try things we've only heard about. Miss Spoff can't take the chance of the school's reputation being ruined by a rash of swollen tummies. She'd have to send some of her young ladies home in disgrace, which is both humiliating and unprofitable. So in her wisdom Miss Spoff keeps the key in the lock, with a sharp eye out for wolves seeking to devour her ewe lambs."

Patsy rolled over and stretched on the edge of Marcy's bed. "Oh, I know the problem, I'm not stupid. But Marce, wouldn't it be swell if we could invite some of the older boys we know? Roger Trilling, and George McGeorge? Even —even Paul."

Was there some hidden object in these speculations? Marcy wondered. Like Aunt Claribel, Patsy was sometimes devious. Not worth fretting about, Marcy decided. She gave Patsy a brisk slap on the taut roundness of her buttocks. "You'll have to corral one of the Wickham Square boys and pretend he's Paul," she said. "Run along now, Pat. You'd better crack that French grammar before M'sieu LaLonde puts you on conditional."

Cool and damp, the evening of the Spring Dance was typical of the New England season. Marcy debated on what to wear, finally deciding on a green taffeta, the shade just matching her eyes. The ivory gown she had worn at the Nautilus Ball was in a closet at home. It was too ostentatious for any school party, and besides—she had worn it when she first met Paul.

When she joined Patsy to walk to the gymnasium, she saw that her cousin was wearing the pretty blue gown of the Nautilus Ball. "Mamma said since this had cost a pretty penny, it was too good to hang unused in a closet," Patsy explained. "So she packed it. Besides, I like it. Let's hurry, Marce. I think I hear the music starting."

The gymnasium was gay in crepe paper streamers. At one end a surprisingly artistic set piece proclaimed, "Welcome, Spring."

"Yours, Pat?" Marcy asked.

Patsy smiled shyly. "Yes. It isn't much, though." Then she giggled. "I had fun—I hope Miss Spoff doesn't notice the leer in that satyr's eye, or the lascivious gleam in Spring's peepers."

"It's as cute as a bug's ear," Marcy said. "Sweet coz, you have a genuine talent. I envy you. Let's hope your cartoon inspires some of the Wickham boys. The ones over there look pretty glum."

They watched the young men from the Episcopal school bob and slide around the dance floor with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, which seemingly was shared by the Spofford girls. Nor was the local orchestra's music inspired.

"We'll get 'em warmed up," Patsy said determinedly. "The girls decided that it would be legal tonight for any girl to ask any fellow to dance, no matter how bored he looks."

"If they don't come to life then, they will when the supper call comes," Marcy said.

Patsy laughed. "That's right—Miss Spoff's spreads bring these gluttons here, not us girls."

"There's your Mr. Andrew Marks," Marcy said. "Under your new rule you could ask him to dance."

Patsy took a deep breath. "Yes, looking like a studious owl. But isn't he kind of cute, even if he is old?" Mr. Marks was twenty-eight. "I think he needs shaking up, and I'm the gal to do it," said Patsy.

Marcy was claimed by her French instructor, M. LaLonde. He was a good dancer, and Marcy liked the way his Gallic eyes sparkled and his ample mustache twitched as they talked, in French, of course, for Marcy was his star pupil. At the end of the set he found her a seat and bowed in Parisian style.

Content on the sidelines, Marcy watched the dancers with a curious feeling of detachment. Somehow she was ages older than these children, though in years they could number as many as hers. That interlude with Paul, that had changed her. At the thought she bowed her head, swept by a longing for Paul so deep, so overpowering, she could hardly bear it. If only he could be here, beside her, her hand clasped tightly in his strong one—

When her reverie was broken by the arrival of Patsy with

Andrew Marks, for a moment she was resentful of those lost dreams. She pushed that thought aside and accepted the young history teacher's invitation to dance. Their conversation mainly concerned Patsy, for Marcy could see the young man was quite smitten with her cousin, but Marcy knew such a wistful attachment could never flower. Miss Spofford had rigid rules forbidding fraternization of her teachers with the girl students. Even beyond that, though Andrew Marks would probably never know it, his social status, though quite respectable, made a liaison with one of these girls unsuitable. At the first hint of a romance, the long arm of the Laughlins would reach out and snatch Patsy abruptly out of his reach forever.

She thought of this later when she was dancing with Hardy Tenniel, her math teacher. The attitude of the Laughlins and the Costains, the Gouches and Huntingdons and Lockes, and all their kind, was unfortunate. Men like Tenniel and Andrew Marks were fine and dedicated men, intelligent, industrious. A girl could do worse, much worse, with the scions of the millionaire families.

Marcy liked Tenniel, a fine teacher, who had helped her over some rough spots in her math course. She was surprised when after their dance, he brought her back to her place and sat down beside her. "I want to talk to you, Miss Tarrant. I've heard a rumor around these hallowed halls that you're planning a career as an engineer. I find that bothers me."

"Did you think I was cramming your course just for fun?" she asked. "Yes, I do plan to become an engineer."

"That's—well, rather unusual," Tenniel said, running fingers through his thinning hair.

"Not really," Marcy said. "You see, my father owns a successful contracting business. I've been raised in the shadow of dams and bridges and embankments since I could toddle. I like the work and I think I can make a success of it."

"You know what you may be getting into?"

"I know it's a masculine world, and I'll meet some resentment. But that won't stop me. My father, Mr. Tenniel, is known as Tough Tom Tarrant. I've inherited a good deal of that."

"It will take more than that when you run up against the professional clique," he said grimly. "A woman in their sacred preserves—you'll meet scorn and ridicule in college, and when you get your degree—" He shook his head. "You'll

find many doors closed to a woman. You finish here this June? Where will you go next fall?"

"If they'll let me in, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology."

"Whew! You set your sights high enough, that's for sure. But if you're as stubborn as you say, you might as well try for the best. And M.I.T. is taking some woman students. If anyone can make it, Marcy, I think you can. You have French and German, basic science languages. Your thinking is logical, you have poise and confidence. Still, I must advise you to give your plan long and serious consideration before you embark on it. For your own sake, Marcy."

"I appreciate this, Mr. Tenniel," Marcy said. "I've already learned that women seldom win when they make a frontal attack on the world of men. We gain more by indirection, and the use of the weapons with which nature has provided us."

"Women's wiles, eh?" Tenniel asked, smiling. His hand reached out and touched hers. "I must say that in your case nature has been generous. Marcy, good luck if you decide to follow your ambition. If there's ever anything I can do—"

She watched him go, knowing his warning had been wise, and finding that it shook her a little. Yet he had not shaken her fierce resolve. She wanted more in her life than to be wife, bedmate, and mother. God must have intended more for women than to be poorly paid housekeepers and complacent brood mares. She'd be damned, she thought harshly, if she'd ever submit to being a mere handmaiden to any man. Even Paul Costain. Well, maybe Paul . . . .

She danced with a few of the older Wickham Square boys—and was pleased that the tempo of the gala was stepping up. Some of the young men were a bit flushed; Marcy suspected that there was a bottle of wine circulating in the cloakroom.

At that moment the band began again, the tune "After the Ball." *Our song,* Marcy thought, *Paul's and mine.* Nostalgia swept over her, a great loneliness. Alone, she slipped out the side door, wrapless, into the cool spring air. She breathed deep, savoring a promise of summer soon to come. Summer and Paul.

The cool touched her bare shoulders and arms. She shivered and turned to go in. At the door she almost ran into the young man who was huddled in the doorway. In the scattered light she saw that he was stocky, tousle-haired.

His pale face turned toward her, his horn-rimmed glasses glinting blankly.

"Best go inside, young man, or you'll catch cold," Marcy told him.

"I hope so. I hope it turns into pneumonia," he said morosely. He pulled the door open and held it for her. "That would be one way to escape from my cell at Wickham Square prison."

"That bad?" She took his arm as they went inside. "Come along and tell me about it."

They found a secluded corner, well away from the beat of the band music. "Now, I'd like to hear why a young man like you is so glum when others are enjoying themselves."

"Are you some kind of counselor?" he asked, almost rudely. "You might be a student, though you're prettier than most of them. But no, a student wouldn't waste time on a clod like me. You must be a counselor."

"Not guilty," she said, smiling. "I am a student. Would you like to dance?"

He shook his head. "Never learned how. But if you'd like to talk—" There was a note of longing in the words.

"Of course," Marcy said, looking into his solemn face. *Why, he's older than I thought, about my age*, she guessed. Intelligent face, high forehead, sensitive mouth—he looked like a scholar, she decided. "I'm Marcy Tarrant, finishing my last year here."

He touched her extended hand. "Barry Olden, last term at Wickham Square School."

"You'll be going on, Barry? Where?"

"M.I.T., if my finals at the school are high enough. I've just got to get in, Miss Tarrant—Marcy—I've just got to. I'll die if I don't make it."

"Why, that's where I'm going, too. I plan to become an engineer."

The lift of his head and the faint smile told of his innate feeling of superiority. "A lady engineer, eh? That's a hot one!"

Marcy's temper flared. "What's wrong with that? Women have just as good minds as men, maybe better."

He recoiled, startled at her reaction. "I didn't mean—well, it just isn't the field for a girl. You know—outside in all kinds of weather, rough places, rough men—"

"Now you listen to me, Mr. Barry Olden," Marcy said tersely. "I know mathematics and construction. I can hold a

Philadelphia rod on a survey crew and read the cores from a diamond drill. I can handle a team of Percherons on a wheeled scraper, and I can figure the batch mix on a concrete plant. I cut my teeth on jackhammer steel, and I learned what 'Fire in the hole!' meant when most kids were playing hide-and-seek. Can you do those things, Barry Olden?"

"Gosh, Marcy, I didn't mean to offend you," he said with new respect.

"All right, you're forgiven. You see, Barry, my dad runs Tarrant Construction. We've built dams and bridges and levees and such all over northern California and beyond. I'm going to be my father's right-hand girl when I finish school."

"And I'll bet you're a good one," he said. "But Marcy, that isn't what I'm interested in. The field I want to get into is so new the engineering for it barely exists. And M.I.T. is one of the few places where I can study it."

"Tell me about it," she said, pleased to have broken through his shell.

Barry Olden spilled out his dreams to Marcy so eagerly that at times he was almost incoherent. She learned he was an only child, his father a wealthy banker. His parents had been divorced some years before, and both of them had remarried, his father twice. He had been shunted from one household to another, to camps, to boarding schools, ever since.

"I don't like Wickham Square much, but it's all the home I've got," he confessed. "My father—" He broke off, his eyes remote. Then he straightened. "But that's all right. I don't need him, and I don't need Miriam. I'll make my own mark in this crazy world, you wait and see. I've got some brains and ability of my own, I don't need anybody to lean against."

"Of course you have," Marcy murmured. "But you haven't told me about this new field you intend to crack."

"Didn't I say? Why, it's self-propelled vehicles, of course." For the first time his voice warmed with enthusiasm. "Marcy, these new machines are great, simply marvelous. Yet most people refuse to accept the revolution they'll bring. And I'm going to be in the middle of it. I'll help change the whole face of the world."

CHAPTER VI

In her next letter to Paul, Marcy omitted any reference to Barry Olden. But when she wrote to her father, she did not curb her enthusiasm.

Daddy, I'll bet you haven't heard of Carl Benz or Gustav Daimler or Frank Duryea? Nor of R.E. Olds or Charles Selden? They didn't mean anything to me either, until the names were hurled at me the other night by an intense young man named Barry Olden. I learned from him that those men are pioneers of the horseless carriage.

Now he has me sold on these machines. Barry says the time will come soon when a horse has no use except sport and pleasure, a mere hobby. The work of the world, he says, and all its transport barring ships and railroads, will be powered by internal combustion engines. He sneers at steam. He claims that one day every family will own a motor car, and will drive wherever they wish, over a great network of highways. How's that for a wild stretch of imagination?

Well, brace yourself, Daddy, for I'm now as crazy as Barry is. The two of us went up to Boston last week to the great automobile show. Some machines were literally horseless carriages, but others—oh, Dad, they made me catch my breath and feel my heart skip! Beautiful, powerful machines, some of them with the power of twenty-five horses. And fast! We were told that some of them can do forty miles an hour on a good road. A new breed, Dad, sleek, handsome. I fell in love with them.

The idea of a machine that can go faster than the fastest horse, without rails, enthralls me. And a machine doesn't eat when it isn't working! So instead of civil engineering when I enter M.I.T. this autumn, I'm going to tackle automotive engineering. Barry says M.I.T. has the best courses in this field in all the U.S.A. I'm hoping, Daddy, that you will approve my plan.

I'm sending you some brochures I picked up at the show. Take a look at them and you'll see why I want to work in this field more than I have ever wanted anything. Or almost. I love you much and much.

Your affectionate daughter,
Marcy

She would have liked to spill out her new enthusiasm to Paul, but she hadn't heard from him for a month. His silence worried her and hurt her. Worse, April brought Marcy's nineteenth birthday. The day was marked by a stack of birthday cards, a number of presents, but nothing from Paul.

May came, and its soft airs brushed aside the weariness of winter. The tulips and daffodils came, and went. Wild flowers began to star the greening meadows. All New England seemed to shake itself and rouse from its winter lethargy.

Now Marcy was counting the days until she could see her beloved San Francisco again, and her father, her friends—and Paul. She was so sure he was making the plans for the summer as he had promised that she refused to worry about it. Instead she kept busy learning all she could about this new miracle, the automobile.

One weekend she traveled with Barry Olden to New York, an overnight trip which would have been forbidden by Miss Spofford, and by the proctors of Wickham Square School, if they had known about it. But the trip went undiscovered.

The authorities need not have worried, Marcy decided with wry amusement. To Barry Olden, no mere girl could compete with a new motor car. *I'd have to have an engine for a heart and wheels in place of arms and legs,* Marcy thought, *for Barry to take a personal interest. I'm only a sounding board for his enthusiasm.*

She had a good time in spite of that, though rather an odd one. After the short train trip, they had plenty of time to spend at the great show at the Armory. Here were all the latest European and American models in every shape and size, bright with paint and brass and leather. Marcy chatted with owners and factory representatives, and gathered the brochures at every booth. It was a revelation to see how many people were actually buying these expensive toys. Barry Olden's predictions were proving entirely accurate.

Before they returned to New Haven, Barry called for Marcy at her hotel and took her to his parents' apartment high in a building on Riverside Drive. Courtney Olden, Barry's father, was a fine-looking, surprisingly youthful man, somewhat stern in manner, with a tangible air of wealth and success. Barry's stepmother, Miriam, was Courtney's third wife, a brittle, high-strung woman of exceptional beauty, who could be immensely charming when she made the effort. Marcy noticed that she greeted Barry cordially enough, in a manner elaborately casual. Yet Marcy felt a sense of

mounting pressure in the woman, as if there were forces within her not quite tamed.

Miriam Olden invited Marcy quite graciously to spend the Christmas holidays with the Oldens in New York, if Marcy could work it out and did not have other plans. Tentative enough, but Marcy thought it kind.

The even tenor of school at Miss Spofford's went on, then it was almost Memorial Day, and the end of the term was in sight. When Marcy was called from class to Miss Spofford's office, she had no inkling that all the world of Marcy Tarrant was about to fall apart.

The stern features of the headmistress were softened by sympathy. She said, "Marceline, the registrar at M.I.T. happens to be a friend of mine. She has informed me that you have been accepted for matriculation at the Institute this fall. My congratulations. It's time we women challenged that world of men."

"Thank you, Miss Spofford," Marcy said. "But I have a feeling that you called me here for some other reason."

The headmistress sighed. "I thought the good news might put you at your ease, the better to bear the bad news I must now give you." Over the expanse of her desk she passed to Marcy a yellow telegraph form. Marcy took it with shaking fingers.

EMILY SPOFFORD, SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.
MISS SPOFFORD'S ACADEMY MAY 28, 1900
NEW HAVEN, CONN.

FATHER INJURED BY FALL OF DERRICK STOP CONDITION SERIOUS STOP BETTER TODAY BUT SEND MARCELINE HOME SOONEST

DORA LAUGHLIN

The shock of it staggered Marcy. She grabbed the back of a chair and held tightly. *No, no; not my father!*

"Sit down, child," Miss Spofford ordered.

Gratefully Marcy took the chair.

"We'll get you to the depot in time to catch the evening train West," Miss Spofford said. "You'd better go up and pack. Marceline, don't worry about the school term ending—your work has been so superior, your final grades will be high even without these few days. You have my deepest sympathy, my dear. Be sure that our prayers will be constant for your father's recovery."

"Thank you, ma'am," Marcy said, with an effort. "I'm sure my father will be all right—But I must hurry to him."

Still numbed by the news, Marcy rushed toward her room. *He must get well, he must!* she thought fiercely. *He's had to be father and mother both to me all these years, and how finely he has done it. If he should die—he's never known of that interlude with Paul Costain. For that I thank God.*

In the entrance hall of her dormitory, Marcy glanced at the rack of pigeonholes as she passed, in the automatic check every student learns the first week at school. And there was a letter in her box. She seized it, and saw with a lift of spirit that it was from Paul. She raced up the stairs and flung herself on her bed, ripping the envelope open.

On top of the terrible news of her father's injury, Paul's letter was shattering.

Dear Marcy:

I feel like a damned cad breaking the news to you like this, but I must. Redhead, all our fine plans for a summer together are shot to pieces. I know this will hurt you, but I have an opportunity I can't pass up. I'll make it up to you somehow, darling. I swear I will. Please don't think too badly of me. I'd like to see you and explain in person, but that isn't in the cards. We'll be gone by the time you get back to the city.

The gist of it is, I've got a chance to cruise the South Pacific with Pete Johansen, Ingrid's brother. You know the Johansens own the Blue Star Line. Well, the Line picked up the prettiest little schooner in a trade. They were going to sell her, but Pete bummed her from his dad for a long cruise before they got rid of her. Her name is *Tahiti Star* and she's an absolute beauty. Tahiti is one of the places we'll sail to, we being myself, Pete, and five or six others. We'll be gone at least four months, probably even longer.

I know this is a hell of a way to break this to you cold, with all the fine plans for the summer we had cooked up. But the trip came up on short notice. Marcy, if I passed up this chance I'd kick myself all the rest of my life. So forgive me, honey—just remember how quickly time slides by, so I'll be back to hold you in my arms before you know it. I'll regale you with the diary of my adventures!

You're so gentle, dear one, please be gentle with me now. I'm sure you'll understand, for there are things a man *has* to do that most women find kind of crazy.

I love you,
Paul

Numbly, Marcy folded the letter and slipped it back into its envelope. She sat on the edge of the bed, burying her face in her hands. *When he gets back, if I do see him, it will be no good, no good at all. He has shattered something irreparably. I've put all my hopes on sand, on air . . .*

Can I love Paul again? I suppose so. Yet how many cruel blows can any woman stand, how much male egotism, how many broken promises? Damn you, Paul! If you think you can come back later and pick up where you left off, you've got another think coming. I may forgive you, I suppose I will. But there won't be any doubt in your mind how you've made me feel. And I'll see to it that my heart is never broken like this again.

Lost in the pain of her thoughts, she packed methodically. Nearly finished, she heard the final dismissal bell, feet scuffing in the halls, the hum of conversation and the echo of girlish laughter. She closed and strapped her suitcase, then dropped the lid and locked her small steamer trunk, which would follow her later. On a chair she had set aside a pile of miscellany, mementos, programs, cards and magazines she did not want to take. She should toss Paul's letter into that pile, she thought angrily, but she hadn't the heart to do it.

There was a tap on the door. Patsy entered, her face woebegone. She ran to Marcy and flung her arms around her. "Oh, Marcy, this is terrible! When I heard Uncle Thomas had been hurt, I nearly fainted. Can I help you pack?"

"No, I'm nearly ready, Pat. Thank you."

"You know I love your daddy, Marce. I'll pray every day for him to get better. When you get home, you tell him I'll come to visit him the minute I'm in San Francisco."

"He'll appreciate that, dear. One thing, would you mind getting rid of this junk on the chair for me? If you want any of it, it's yours."

"I'll take care of it." Then, with an odd hesitation, Patsy said, "It's a pity you didn't get to see Paul before he sailed."

Marcy's head snapped up. "You knew about the cruise?"

"Why, everyone did. Do you mean to say that you—?" Patsy's eyes were innocent, but her manner was too elaborately casual.

"Not until I got a letter from him today," Marcy said harshly. "How long have you known about it?"

"Oh, dear, for ages really. I assumed—well, you and Paul were so thick—anyhow, Lisa Gouch, my best girlfriend, is a friend of Ingrid Johansen. The Johansens own the schooner Paul is sailing on. Ingrid told Lisa, and Lisa wrote me."

"So that's how it was," Marcy said slowly. She was determined not to let Patsy see how badly she had been hurt. "Well, I suppose there's nothing for me except to let the boys have their fun. Maybe they'll grow up some day. Or do men ever grow up and get over their love of stag affairs?"

A malicious note was apparent in Patsy's voice now. "Oh, this cruise is hardly stag, Marce. Ingrid is going, and Avis Huntingdon, and Betty Stevens. My friend Lisa was dying to go, but her parents put their foot down. Lisa assured them the trip would be properly chaperoned, since Mrs. Johansen herself was going along, but that didn't cut any ice with the Gouches. Lisa says her parents are practically prehistoric."

"So Ingrid's mother is going, everything right and proper, eh?" Marcy said bitterly. "As Daddy would say, that's a fine hand to draw to. It does surprise me that the other parents weren't just as adamant as Lisa's folks."

"They did say it was unconventional, but our younger generation is now enlightened, quite able to cope with the new freedoms. I wish I were going on the *Tahiti Star*. It's going to be such a wonderful cruise. And Paul—Paul will be on it."

Marcy slammed her train case closed with unnecessary force. Looking up, she saw the half-smile on her cousin's face, round and innocent with its unconcealed air of triumph.

"I'm afraid you'd find the competition more than you could handle," Marcy said. And out of her own pain she added with uncharacteristic cruelty, "You couldn't hold Paul when you were the girl next door, Pat, so you would certainly be badly outclassed on the *Tahiti Star*." Then, seeing the despondent look on her cousin's face, she relented. "Will you be going to the train, Pat? No? Then I'll say goodbye now. I'll look forward to seeing you, dear, in San Francisco in a couple of weeks."

Penitently, Patsy embraced her. "I do feel terribly about it, Marce—everything, I mean."

"I know you do, dear. Run along now, while I finish."

Halting in the doorway, Patsy said "Marce, I *am* sorry about Paul. He'll be back with you, you'll see, as soon as he has these romantic travels behind him. And if he doesn't

come back, remember there are other fish in the sea, and maybe better."

"Perhaps I use the wrong bait," Marcy said, forcing a smile, but thinking that unless Paul, damn him, told her, Patsy would never know that Marcy had expended the ultimate bait on her very first cast.

As Patsy's footsteps clicked down the hall, Marcy went to the window and stared out. In spite of her brave front with her cousin, Marcy had never been hurt so terribly in her nineteen years. Paul's defection had brought her a persistent, fathomless ache. She wondered if she could endure the throb.

CHAPTER VII

Marcy could not repress a smile at the way her father looked in his high hospital bed. Like a man from Mars. One leg was encased in plaster, and elevated by a complicated contraption of weights and pulleys. An arm in a cast stuck out stiffly above the sheets. A turban of gauze concealed most of his pink hair. But his color was good and he could still grin.

She took his good hand in hers. "How do you feel, Daddy?"

"About as well as a man who is spitted and trussed like a pig at Christmas can feel," her father grumbled. "But I'm not the one to complain, mavourneen, since they tell me I'm lucky to be alive. A foot either way—"

"Aunt Dora's telegram said you got in the way of a falling derrick. What happened, Dad?"

"Winding up the Torreon job. We took the boom of the whirly and one timber let go, on the wrong side, o'course, such being the perversity of the inanimate. I heard the Slasher yell 'Headache!' and I tried to scramble clear. But my ould bad leg gave way, and the boom support caught me a glancing blow, the dommed clumsy brute."

"Then it took the doctors five hours to put you back together again, I hear," Marcy said.

"Aye, and a fine bunch of men they are, and the nurses, too. Good mechanics, Marcy, for they say I have enough silver plate in me for the Mint downtown, and enough catgut for a tomcat's Saturday night. Yesterday I threatened to put on my pants and skin out of this joint, but they just laughed at me. They tell me I'll be here most of the summer."

"Sure and I'll wager ye bring 'er in under that estimate," Marcy said. "For 'tis true a broken bone or two never kept a Tarrant down for long."

"May ye have the right of it, honey," Tom Tarrant said. He pulled her closer to the bedside. He said in a low voice, "Mavourneen, I've had a mort of time to think lately. And since meself is pinned down by this devilish contraption, I'll

need you this summer for my arms and legs, since there will be big things afoot."

"My time is yours, Daddy," Marcy said. She did not add that any plans she might have had were blown away with the wind.

"As I say, I've been thinkin'. Not for the first time, but this brush with the grim reaper brought things to a head. Marcy, I've decided yon Torreon job is the last project of Tarrant Construction. I'm getting out."

Not a complete surprise, Marcy thought; he was growing older. "You'll miss the harness, Dad," she said gently. "Are you sure you're ready for retirement?"

"Girl, who said anything about retirement? I have a thing or two in mind to occupy my days. It's only that I want to get well away from the heavy grind. You see, we have a fair stake built up, plus a good chunk from the final settlement on the Torreon job. There will be enough for a frail and ancient man to embark on some less strenuous line of work."

"Frail and ancient indeed!" Marcy scoffed. "Thomas, you can outthink and outwork most men half your age."

"I pride myself that's true," he said seriously. "But for me the fun has gone out of the construction trade. I had a great pleasure in building things, but now it has turned to drudgery. It's time I got out of it. Another thing, mavourneen, in this trade the contractors work like dogs, then someone else reaps the profits. We must borrow from the banks on these big projects, there are such large sums involved. And what we have to pay for that money skims all the cream and leaves us watery milk. Remember the San Saba bridge? Costain Brothers never turned a hand, but at the end of it they had made twice what we did out of it. On the Torreon job, I swallowed my pride and went to Cham Laughlin. The deal I got from Cham was much better, though nothing to write home about. No, no, mavourneen, I'm tired of taking the risks and facing the dangers while those whelps at the banks sit on their fat duffs and rake in the ante and the pot. No more of that for me."

"You're going to liquidate? You want me to help?"

"I do that. Marcy, you're a brave bright lass, and you know the business and my ways. I've been talking to Ed Osweiler and Malcolm Marshall, and they're ready to take over if the terms are right. I think they can do it; they're good men. They'll carry on the name; it will be Marshall-Osweiler-Tarrant. So here's what we've got to do. . . ."

For an hour he gave Marcy instructions, and she made notes on her pad. When he finished and she stood up, she said, "I'll get things moving and report tomorrow, Daddy."

"You've got carte blanche, mavourneen," he said, smiling. Then he frowned. "It still gravels me to be wrecking all your plans for a fine summer."

"It will be fun enough being involved in something as interesting and important as this," she said, smiling at him. "Stop fretting about me, Thomas Tarrant, and concentrate on getting well."

The next day, as Marcy's heels clicked down the long aseptic hallway at St. Vincent's, she heard voices from her father's room. She found her aunt, Claribel Laughlin, sitting in the rocker, chatting amiably with Tom Tarrant. On the night stand was a basket of fancy fruit with a gay ribbon bow. It surprised Marcy somewhat to see her aunt, for these two were often at sword's points. Marcy was sure it stemmed back to the untimely death of her sister-in-law, Aimee Tarrant. The Laughlins were a long time in forgiving Tom Tarrant for that, though the fault was not his, and his loss was even more bitter than theirs. The friction had faded as time passed, though it was only in the past two or three years that her cousin Patsy had been allowed to be friendly with Marcy.

"Marcy, so nice to see you!" Claribel exclaimed, extending her hand. Marcy took it, nodding and smiling. She had decided long since that Claribel was not really stupid. She had never had to exercise her brain, so vapid and *outré* remarks came easily to her. At times Marcy had found her aunt shrewd to the point of cleverness. There was a lurking suspicion in Marcy's mind that Claribel's extensive campaign to have Marcy attend Miss Spofford's Academy was to provide a cost-free mentor and chaperone for the younger cousin.

"You're looking well, child," Claribel went on. "How nice it is that Thomas is making such good progress. My, it must have been a shock when you received dear Dora's telegram. I thought of having Patsy return with you, but it was so near the end of the spring term, and my darling was *so* looking forward to the spring prom, I just didn't have the heart. Now I worry about the poor innocent taking that long train ride alone."

"She'll be all right, Auntie, she knows the ropes now," Marcy said "She's getting quite grown up, you know."

She took a straight chair beside the bed, taking her father's hand, and giving him her sunniest smile. She saw that the ominous gauze turban had given away to a strip of surgical tape. He gave her a wink, with a slight nod of the head toward Claribel.

"Now that you have someone here, Thomas, I must run along," Claribel said, hoisting herself up from the rocker. "A thousand things to do, with my Patricia returning in three days. Marcy, the two of you must get together often. Cham tells me the horses at our Marin place are getting fat and sassy from lack of riding."

"You tempt me, Auntie, you know how I like to ride," Marcy said. "Though with my Irishman flat on his back, my time will be well taken up. But we'll see."

"Your summer may prove dull, with the Costain boy off cruising in the Pacific," Claribel said archly. "Such a romantic plan, wasn't it? Quite Melvilleish, really. Oh dear, I hope they don't meet any of those huge whales! Isn't our Paul a dear boy? And so handsome. I can't say I entirely approve of this sailing expedition—so unconventional, you know. I wonder about five boys and three girls on a small schooner sailing through the exotic tropics. But that's the younger generation. I suppose we all must accept the new *mores*."

Claribel's face was bland, but Marcy couldn't avoid the jab of the needle. She said, "I'm sure their morals are above temptation, Auntie. And of course they have a chaperone."

"She'll be kept busy enough," Claribel said with unusual practicality. "She'll need the eyes of—who was it, Argus?—to keep track of that melange. Marcy, sometimes it makes me shudder when I think of my Pat and you growing up in these immoral times. All this free love, free talk—why, young people talk of things quite openly that would have gotten my mouth washed out with soap when I was young. The things they do, this cruise through the warm tropics among the godless men and women of the far islands. . . ." She broke off, and stood staring out the window, her eyes oddly warm, her pink tongue tip touching generous lips.

The thought of it stirs life in you, Aunt Claribel, Marcy said silently. She felt Claribel knew now she'd missed something in life, something Claribel had never dared reach for, with her strict family, her pride, her inbred inhibitions. Even when she decried the morals of this cruise of the *Tahiti Star*, a strange envy must have gnawed at her, Marcy

felt, though her aunt would never admit it, not even to herself, not even in her dreams.

When Claribel had gone, Tom Tarrant sighed. "A worthy woman, your aunt, but how she does run on! A bit of Claribel goes a long way. Now Dora, the dear soul, I look forward to her visits. 'Tis a pity that she has let Claribel convince her she is condemned to spinsterhood, the pretty thing, just because she's past the first flush of her youth. Mavourneen, that woman didn't bother you with her palaver about the young Costain?"

Marcy was startled. "What do you know of Paul Costain and me?"

"You think you can have secrets around a doting couple like our Mary and Lulu? They told me how he gave you the grand rush after New Year's. And I saw at the train when you left that you had a soft spot in your heart for that handsome devil. Yon Claribel dropped a word about him now and again, and I pumped your Aunt Dora a time or two. I hold no brief either for or against Paul, though you know I'm not an admirer of the Costain tribe. Still, if Paul has hurt you, darlin', and then run off to the South Seas, he will find when he gets back that there's hell to pay and no pitch hot."

"No, no, Daddy," Marcy protested. "As you say, Paul is a handsome devil, and the two of us did have a little romance. It was fun, and I had a few dreams, but it all petered out. At first I was sad, but I got over it. I had no strings on Paul; he's his own man. The whole thing is over, so just forget him, Daddy, as I have." The lie, in her pride, slipped easily from her lips.

If her explanation did not entirely reassure Tom Tarrant, he did not pursue the matter. Instead he began talking business. "This young Barry Olden you wrote about. He's moonstruck about motor cars?"

"He is. He's gone into it very deeply, Dad. And I confess I'm convinced he's right about their tremendous future. You've looked over the brochures we picked up at the New York and Boston shows?"

"I've studied them from A to Zed, as well as the motor magazines you sent. Marcy, what would you say to going into that business in San Francisco after we've liquidated Tarrant Construction? Selling and repairing them, I mean."

"A marvelous idea, Dad!" Marcy exclaimed. "It would

keep you busy, yet not be as strenuous as the construction industry. Can I be your partner?"

"That's what I'm planning. We should get in on the ground floor, though we'll want to take a good look at each step before we commit ourselves."

"That's why I want to go to M.I.T.—they have some courses I'll need to tell me what I must know as your partner. The faculty there thinks the automobile will revolutionize all the world's transport."

Tom Tarrant nodded. "And I think they're right. But mavourneen, why go all the way back there? Why not go to Berkeley, or the university here in the city?"

Marcy shook her head. "I'd like to, so I could be with you. But they don't have the courses I need, not yet, at least."

"Automotive engineering, you say they call it?" The pink eyebrows were quizzical. "So be it, then. We'll keep thinking about it, honey, and as soon as I get on my feet again, I'll make deeper studies. As you say, we don't want to go off half-cocked, but I'm pretty sure the two of us can make a real go out of Tarrant Motors."

"Then here's some more material I brought to keep you entertained," she said, putting a stack of papers on his night stand. "Now, I've got to run. I have a lunch date with a young man from Price, Morehouse, to talk about his firm doing the audit and inventory of Tarrant Construction. Be sure now you keep out of mischief."

Her father snorted derisively. "When I'm boxed in plaster and swathed in cotton? I look like some ould Roman statue. There'll be no chasing nurses down the halls for some time to come, I fear. Tell me, Marcy, the why of one conundrum: how these angels in white know the exact minute a man gets to sleep, so they can wake him up to dose him?"

"That's beyond my purview, Dad," Marcy said, laughing, and departed.

Dominic Renfrow, the young man from Price, Morehouse, was personable, deferential, utterly serious. Over lunch at the Checkers Club, for which Marcy insisted on paying, Renfrow outlined for her the procedure and manpower the accounting firm would use if they were hired to make the complete audit of the Tarrant Construction books, and the inventory of all physical equipment and supplies.

At the end of his presentation, Renfrow closed his notebook and tucked it into a vest pocket. "We could probably wind up the whole business for you within a two-month period," he said. "I'm afraid, though, the fee I'll quote may seem rather high for a comparatively small company. Yet for it you will get your money's worth in thoroughness and accuracy."

"We're prepared for that. We want the prestige of Price, Morehouse behind our figures," Marcy said. She signaled the waiter for the check. "You'll be in charge, Mr. Renfrow?"

"I hope so," he said. For the first time his voice lost its cool impersonality. He leaned forward. "Miss Tarrant, I've been with the firm three years. This would be the first real chance I've had to show our management what I can do. It might mean—well, a great deal to me."

"I'll have to check your figures, but offhand I think Tarrant Construction will find your proposal acceptable," Marcy said. "If we accept, I'll make it a point to ask your firm to place you in charge."

"That would be most kind of you, Miss Tarrant," the young accountant said.

She paid the check, adding a generous tip. As they walked to the foyer, Renfrow said, "Thanks for the lunch, Miss Tarrant. I want to say that it was doubly pleasant to do business with a young lady who is so intelligent as well as pretty. Perhaps some time—"

Marcy laughed, as he broke off in rather boyish confusion. "Perhaps, Mr. Renfrow," she said. "If things work out, remember that I know more about the ins and outs of Tarrant Construction than anyone except my father, who is out of touch temporarily."

"I'll certainly call on your knowledge," Renfrow said.

As Marcy walked down Sutter Street, she was pleased with the meeting. The open admiration of her young accountant, the approving glances of the male clientele of the Checkers were soothing to a bruised ego. To be treated as an intelligent human being without losing the esteem accorded to a pretty woman restored her confidence.

CHAPTER VIII

Marcy kept busy in the weeks that followed. At her personal insistence, Price, Morehouse gave Dominic Renfrow the Tarrant assignment. He had three accountants auditing the corporate books in the Tarrant offices on Sutter Street, while Renfrow himself was supervising the inventory at the Tarrant yards in South San Francisco.

With all work closed down, Marcy told him that everything was now in the yards, light and heavy equipment, tools and supplies, wagons and scrapers and livestock. She was rather amused at the problems the young man of books and figures met trying to learn the ramifications of the unfamiliar business. He was finding even the terminology puzzling. What was a whirly, or a jackhammer? Which was a buggy, and which an Irish banjo? What was the difference between a slip and a wheeler?

Ed Osweiler and Mal Marshall, soon to be the new owners, were around the yards most of the time, so Renfrow could well have asked his questions of them. But he called Marcy instead, and over lunch or dinner he would submit his problem, and solemnly write the answer in his little notebook. Marcy was not displeased by his transparent stratagems. She found Paul's hold on her weakening day by day.

She had little time for social affairs, so she was only vaguely aware that by midsummer the upper echelons of San Francisco society were all agog over the approaching visit of Rupert, prince of Saxe-Coburg, cousin of the British royal family. Campaigns of Machiavellian intricacy were plotted in the plush drawing rooms of Nob Hill and Pacific Heights. It would be a feather in the tiara of the matron who managed to capture His Highness for tea, or lunch, or dinner, a feather which could be reflaunted long after the event. Where there were nubile daughters in the house, the ploys for a time became even more devious. The cloud of disappointment which enveloped Nob Hill, when the news came that there was already a Princess Lilli and a pair of daughters, was so dense it brought out the foghorns on the Bay.

To Marcy, deeply involved in her own affairs, Prince Rupert was only an echo, a blurred name in the headlines. So she was unprepared when she got an urgent call from Dora Laughlin.

"Marcy dear, isn't it thrilling?" came Dora's excited voice over the telephone. "And we're all going to meet him. The banking houses, Laughlins, Costains, Gouches, and Trillings, are combining in the sponsorship of a grand ball at the Palace Hotel on Tuesday next. As a member of the sponsoring family, you are invited, of course."

"But Aunt Dora, I don't know anything about the man. Except to satisfy a mild curiosity, it would be a waste of time."

"Marcy Tarrant, stop being frivolous!" her aunt commanded. "You wouldn't dare miss *the* event of our summer social season. You go right out and buy yourself a new gown, the prettiest one you can find. Wear your mother's pearls. You simply must meet the prince."

Marcy bowed to the inevitable. "All right, all right, Auntie. I suppose it will be permissible to have a young man escort me?"

"Of course, but—" There was a little pause. "He will be personable, Marcy?"

"I'll see that he cleans his nails and scrubs behind his ears. And if he doesn't have evening clothes, I'll make him rent them."

Dom Renfrow looked appalled when Marcy asked him to escort her to the grand ball in honor of Prince Rupert.

"But Marcy," he protested. "I've never moved in these rarefied circles. They're too rich for my blood. I'm sure I wouldn't know how to act. Why don't you impress one of those gilded youths my mom is always reading about in the Sunday paper?"

"Oh, rubbish!" Marcy said. "You'll find it no more rarefied than a college prom. Probably much less fun, too. My spies tell me that Prince Rupert puts his trousers on one leg at a time, just as you do. I'll expect you, in white tie and tails, at our house on Franklin Street, eight o'clock, Tuesday."

The stunned look left his face and he grinned at her. "All right. Maybe I can get my kid brother to hold my trousers for me, as the prince's valet must hold his. And say—" he gave her an enigmatic look. "Maybe I'll have a surprise for you, a real surprise."

"I love surprises, Dom," Marcy said. "Tell me now."

"Nope, then it wouldn't be a surprise. Besides, it might not come off, and then I'd have egg all over my face." He looked as smug, Marcy thought, as a boy with a frog in his pocket.

To avoid humiliating the Laughlins, Marcy went to her old friend M. Perrault of the City of Paris store. He agreed to have her new gown ready by the night of the ball. He said, "Mlle. Tarrant, it is a great *plaisir* for a couturier like Perrault to show off his genius on a young lady like you. You turn his creations into pure poetry." She rewarded him with a dazzling smile.

When Dom Renfrow reached her house, a little late, he gave a soft gasp of admiration. She could feel the wonder of his gaze as she pinned on the orchid corsage he had brought her.

"Marcy, you—you're absolutely beautiful," he said. "You take my breath away. I chose the corsage to go with your hair. I hope my choice was right."

"Perfect, Dom, perfect," she said. Adjusting her hair in the hall mirror, she was pleased with her appearance. The silk crepe dress in fashionable water-green complemented her eyes and the flame of her hair. Fitted skin-tight at her trim hips and waist, its daring decolletage accentuated her fine bosom.

Dom helped her on with her evening cloak. "Sorry I was late, Marcy. I was managing the surprise."

Curious, Marcy went down the steps with him. At the curb she saw a group of men and small boys admiring a small motor car, a runabout bright with red paint, gleaming with brass.

"*Voilà!* The surprise!" Renfrow exclaimed.

Marcy paused to look over the machine, herself the new wonder for the eyes of the bystanders. Then, as Dom opened the door for her, she gathered her long skirt and climbed in, settling herself on the red leather seat.

He went around to the other side, adjusted some levers, and going to the front of the car, he pulled the crank. The engine stuttered into life, and the car shook violently. He climbed in, and with a "Gronk-gronk!" of the rubber-bulbed horn, they moved away down the street.

"Just got 'er today," Dom said, pride in his voice. "I've been working and saving for her for two years. The raise I just got from Price, Morehouse cinched it, thanks to you, Marcy."

"I didn't know you were an automobile buff," Marcy said,

watching him adjust levers and operate pedals. "Dom, your car is a little beauty. What kind is it?"

"Pope-Winston, Model B. Four gears ahead, one reverse, twelve horsepower engine, hand brakes and foot brakes. The new electric headlamps, too. I could put the top up, Marcy, if you think the breeze will muss your hair."

"My tulle veil is pinned on firmly," she said, grabbing the handrail as he turned a corner. "I want to see and be seen. You know this is actually my first ride in an automobile?"

"It is? Hope you enjoy it. When I get a little handier myself, I'll teach you to drive her. Think of it, Marcy, the power of twelve horses under that metal hood."

There was some delay from carriages ahead before Dom could pull up at the door of the Palace Hotel. Some of the coachmen had difficulty controlling their teams at the sight of the little car. Dom and Marcy intercepted some angry looks from drivers and footmen, but pretended indifference. When they stopped under the porte-cochere, Dom said, "Wait inside, Marcy. I've got to put the car in the carriage yard."

While she waited, Marcy wondered if the unfriendly coachmen had any idea of what the red car portended for them. She thought, *Better keep your eyes open, boys. You'd better learn to handle a steering wheel instead of a pair of reins, or one of these days you'll be out of a job.*

Dom rejoined her. "I put her in a far corner, under an arc light," he said, taking her arm. "I didn't like the way some of these horsey people glared at her. Do they understand she's a threat to their livelihood?"

"I was just wondering the same thing," she said. As they paused at the archway to the ballroom, she asked, "Dom, what do you think of all this? It gives me a guilty feeling."

The great hotel, the pride of San Francisco, had been transformed by the four banking families into a scene that was breathtaking even in a city famous for lavish entertainments. The ballroom and the smaller rooms were banked with fresh flowers. They almost obscured the dais on which Gus Thalberg waved his baton over a twenty-piece orchestra. Behind the dais hung huge flags, the Stars and Stripes, the British Union Jack, the flag of Imperial Germany, and the state flag of Prince Rupert's own Saxe-Coburg.

In the swelling crowd the men looked like sober penguins in their black and white, against the ladies' attire, the gowns scintillating in every rainbow color, in silk and satin, velvet

and taffeta, peau de soie and organdy. And jewels—Marcy gasped, touching the fine strand of pearls that had been her mother's, for they seemed almost gauche in the glittering display of opulence. Here were fortune on fortune of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, opals, in silver and gold and platinum, coruscating in the blaze of the crystal chandeliers.

"Why guilty, pretty lady?" Dom asked. "What about this makes you bow your lovely red head as if in mortal sin?"

"This display—it's so overwhelming," Marcy said. "This shows a reservoir of wealth so vast my mind can hardly grasp it. Dom, there's enough on one of those refreshment tables to feed a hundred poor souls in Chinatown for a week."

"I hadn't looked on it that way," Dom said, taking her arm and leading her through the press toward the collation in a smaller side room. "This is too strange a world to me to pass judgment. I've heard about it, but I wasn't sure it really existed."

"We knew the bite of poverty, Dom. That's why I must keep calculating that a small fraction of the diamonds one of these women is wearing could free from poverty for the rest of their lives many of our poor devils south of the Slot. It just doesn't seem fair. I suppose part of it is their manner. They just can't conceive what it is to be dirt poor."

"Your family, Marcy, owning Tarrant Construction?"

She nodded as they went through the far door and joined the long receiving line. "Tom Tarrant, the upstart builder, ran off with Aimee Laughlin, from one of these families. The next day every important door in the city banged shut. The Laughlin interests applied the pressure in all directions to destroy Dad's business. But he was Tough Tom Tarrant, and he battled his way to success in spite of them. It's all water over the dam now, and the Laughlins have come around, after Mother's death."

"They don't hold a grudge, then?"

"There's still a coolness. But Dom, as a small girl it brought me to the knowledge of what it meant to go to bed half hungry, because we didn't have cash to buy food. Is it any wonder I think this extravaganza is ostentatious, and futile, and un-Christian."

"I'm sure you're right, Marce, but I tell you, it sure takes the breath away from a simple country boy like me," Dom said.

She looked him up and down in cutaway and white tie, satin-striped trousers, onyx studs and patent leather pumps.

She squeezed his arm. "A country boy? Dom, you're an impostor. You look as if you were born to the purple, one of our young tycoons with the Midas touch."

He leaned closer. "Rented," he said in a hoarse whisper.

In that great cavern that was the ballroom of the Palace, the Gouches and the Trillings, the Costains and the Laughlins stood before the dais, the orchestra playing softly behind them; the women in gorgeous gowns and more than amply bejeweled. It was a relief to Marcy that Mrs. Costain tonight was not adorned by that awful diamond stomacher. As Marcy touched the hand of Norbert Costain, she felt a little shock as she saw how much Costain resembled his son, though he was more patrician than Paul. Perhaps the infusion of the plebeian blood of Cleopatra, the daughter of a boarding-house keeper, had toughened the blood lines of French aristocrats.

In a manner suitable to the occasion, Claribel gushed over Marcy and her escort. "How nice of you to come with Marcy, how nice," she said. "You're in business, Mr. Renfrow?"

"Yes, I'm with Price, Morehouse," Dom said gravely, not elaborating. Marcy suppressed a chuckle. Dom could hold his own with Claribel. Cham Laughlin looked up quickly and smiled when he heard the name of the great accounting firm.

"My Patsy and Lisa Gouch and their friends have a table in the refreshment room," Claribel gushed on. "I'm sure they'd love to have you join them." She drew herself up proudly, like a pouter pigeon. "But first you must meet our guests of honor. Your Highness, may I present my niece, Marceline Tarrant, and her escort, Mr. Renfrow."

Marcy found the prince trim and athletic in appearance, though somewhat older than she had expected. His wife, Princess Lilli, was blonde, lissome, and utterly charming. The prince bowed low over Marcy's hand, touching it with his lips. When he straightened he smoothed his narrow mustache with a forefinger. "Charmed, Miss Tarrant," he said. "I have been watching come near that torch of flame. Most beautiful, the red hair; the sight of it warms the soul." The accent was heavy, the clear blue eyes laughing.

"Thank you, Your Highness," Marcy said in German. "What a pretty compliment! I join in welcoming you and your lovely wife to our city."

"You speak our language well," Prince Rupert said. "Per-

haps when this is all—" he waved a hand toward the crowd, "has thinned away, you and Herr Renfrow will join Lilli and me for a good talk. I find it hard to converse in a tongue not one's own, a language one does not *think in.*"

"Later, then, Your Highness. It will be a pleasure," Marcy told him.

As she and Dom walked away and the line moved up, Dom said, "I'd forgotten you spoke German. What did he say?"

"We are to join the prince's personal party later. I think he wants to speak German with me."

"And he wants to talk to the most beautiful girl at this ball, too," Dom said.

They found Patsy Laughlin and her friends in the big supper room which had been set aside for refreshments. "Please join us," Patsy said, and introduced her effervescent friend Lisa Gouch, tall and saturnine George McGeorge, and Roger Trilling, chubby and red of cheek.

A waiter came up and took their order, from an endless list of cocktails, highballs, and coolers, slings, daisies, sours, and juleps, besides wine of every variety.

"Quite a fun fight, eh, Renfrow?" McGeorge asked.

"I've never seen anything quite like it," Dom said with a touch of awe.

"Old San Fran and our folks have pulled out all the stops," Trilling said. "I say, this Rupert is a handsome devil. A pretty wife, too. On top of that, the man is loaded."

"Perhaps the tenth largest fortune in all Europe, according to my father," Lisa Gouch said.

"Rich, eh? No wonder we banking types kowtow to His Royal Highness," McGeorge said.

"That's backwards, Georgie," Trilling protested. "This gent could be busted as flat as a kid's balloon, and you'd still see the crowd flocking around him. It's a truism that we Americans are the biggest lovers of a title in this wide world. Many a humble count or baron has traded a title, real or bogus, for the daughter of a nouveau-riche family, and some not so darn nouveau. Thereby the girl and Mama too are elevated to dazzling social status. Papa may have to buy the rascal off later, but the girl keeps the title, and the rascal keeps the money. So everybody is happy."

"You're such a cynic, Roger," Patsy said. "The girl could be truly in love with her handsome baron or count or whatever."

"Darling Patsy, you have such a flair for romance," Trilling said jeeringly. "You view the world always through rose-colored glasses. You agree with Candide, that this is 'the best of all possible worlds.' Some day, my dear, that world will up and bite you."

"I don't care what you say, this world *is* a wonderful place," Patsy said defensively.

"Bravo, Pat!" McGeorge applauded. "I'm afraid it's not all that good, but it's the only world we have."

Marcy and Dom sipped their drinks, not joining the conversation. What a strange combination of naïveté and sophistication, Marcy thought. They shocked their elders with some of their advanced ideas, yet some of their theories would amuse their contemporaries who were aswim in the real world. These privileged youths seemed a whole generation behind her. Marcy supposed they'd grow up, in time—the hard way.

The reception line had finally dwindled away, and the dance music had begun. Marcy gave Dom a slight signal, and the two of them excused themselves from the group. A little of that frothy bickering went a long way with Marcy, she decided. To the strains of a Strauss waltz, they made their way across the ballroom to join Prince Rupert's party.

Free for the moment, the prince saw them and raised a hand in signal. Dom said softly, "I love to waltz. D'you think a plebeian like me dare ask the lovely Lilli to dance?"

"I'll ask the prince for you, in German," Marcy said, laughing.

The prince granted Dom permission, and a brilliant smile came over the lovely face of the princess It was evident she too loved to waltz, and Marcy guessed that with Lilli's limited knowledge of English, she had felt rather left out. She came into Dom Renfrow's arms, and the couple, looking very handsome, swooped gracefully away.

Marcy took the seat the prince indicated beside him, and began chatting in German. He proved to be pleasant, gentlemanly, and interesting. He was enjoying America, he said, though business matters hadn't progressed as well as he had hoped. He had learned a great deal, however, and he found the factories making the American motor cars most fascinating.

"You're interested in the automobile?" Marcy asked, surprised.

"*Ach*, yes, Fräulein. I have started a small factory in

Gotha. We are making a machine I think very fine. But expensive, and not very many yet. As the art progresses, we are always improving, having new ideas. Myself and my superintendent, Herr Landstaff, are convinced that the motor car will change all conceptions of transport in the world."

"I agree, Your Highness. In fact my father and I are thinking very seriously of embarking on a venture in motor cars. No, no, not to make them. We are planning to act as sales agents on the Pacific Coast for several makes of machines. We've gone into studies of the matter that seem encouraging."

He leaned toward her. "Frl. Tarrant, what you say intrigues me. I will need an outlet in California for my Saxon-Benz. It is a squirrel cage, you see. If we can make more cars, we can bring the price down. If we bring the price down, we will sell more cars. Right now my factory loses money, which I do not like. Still, for me it is like a disease, I cannot get away from the designing, the intricacy, the means of improving. My father and my other ancestors before him, they were tied always to the land, the crops, the livestock. Now I wish to break from tradition, into this exciting new field."

"I think you are one of many who feel that way, Your Highness," Marcy said. "My young man, the one dancing with your pretty wife, is attracted to the motor car just as you are. He has saved his salary, and spent more than he can afford to buy the car that brought us here tonight."

"A new auto? What make?" the prince asked eagerly.

"Pope-Winston. A handsome red car. It runs well."

"Their new Model B, with the engine of twelve horsepower? That I would like greatly to see, Frl. Tarrant."

The music ended, and Dom Renfrow brought Princess Lilli back to the table, flushed and smiling. The prince stood and seated his wife, but remained standing, looking expectantly at Dom. Marcy took the cue, and said, "Dom, Prince Rupert is an automobile enthusiast. He'd like to see your runabout."

Dom was startled but pleased as he asked, "Of course, Your, ah, Highness. How about right now?"

The music began again, and Chalmers Laughlin came over to claim his dance with Princess Lilli. As she moved onto the dance floor with the banker, she flung something in German over her shoulder. The prince and Marcy laughed.

"What did she say?" Dom asked.

Marcy translated. "Rupert, you know the grease on your shirt front never comes out, so be careful."

"It would not be the first time I get so interested I forget I am wearing good clothes," Prince Rupert said. "I think I must be careful." The three crossed the great room and went out into the gentle summer night.

They crossed the street to the carriage yard, and came up to the Pope-Winston in its lighted corner. The prince walked around it, admiring the car. He said, "Design is the key, Herr Renfrow. Few men have the vision to see not what a car is, but what it must become. That is why I have tried to lure Herr Benz away from his so-successful company. He gives me some very fine help on my engine, but to Gotha he will not come. You have good men like Benz in America, Mr. Olds, Mr. Henry Ford, Mr. Pope, several more. As I cross the land, I stop and pick their brains. I suppose they pick mine, too, which is goot."

He stood in front of the runabout, his arms folded. The bluish light from the arc lamp above gave the red paint an odd magenta tinge. Marcy heard him say in German, "What a beauty! What a beauty!" Then he asked in English, "Would it be of too much trouble, Herr Renfrow, to make it start for me?"

"Why, not at all," Dom said nonchalantly, leaning in to adjust the controls. Marcy smiled, guessing the prince's request had not forestalled an offer by Dom by many seconds.

Again the engine started at the first pull of the crank. It chugged contentedly, the car body vibrating. Dom slid in behind the wheel and motioned the prince to climb in the passenger side. He put the car in gear and let out the clutch. With a slight jerk the car rolled away. Dom turned a switch and the runabout's electric headlights came on.

Dom took two turns around the empty part of the yard, then braked to a stop under the arc lamp where Marcy stood. Leaving the engine running, he jumped out, "Move over, Prince, and try her," he said.

Grinning with anticipation, Prince Rupert slid into the driver's seat. He started jerkily, soon got the hang of it, and sent the runabout circling the carriage yard. After three rounds, he stopped the car under the lamp and got out, leaving the engine running.

"Many thanks, Herr Renfrow," he said. "A very fine machine. It rides goot, it is well powered. I like its electric lamps. You will have much pleasure from this fine machine."

"I hope so. The darned thing cost me enough," Dom said.

The Pope-Winston chose that moment to grunt, shudder, and lapse into silence. In the quiet that followed, Marcy could hear the crackling of hot metal, and the distant sound of music from the ballroom.

"What the devil?" Dom asked. "And I'm no mechanic—"

"I think maybe the mixture—" the prince suggested.

Dom unlatched the hood and looked with a layman's bafflement at the tangle of wires and tubing, the odd shapes of metal parts, all dark with the residue of oil vapors. Marcy leaned over his shoulder, not in the least intimidated by this iron puzzle. She and Barry had probed into engine workings and designs at several auto shows.

Peeling off his tailcoat, Prince Rupert laid it on the car seat. He rolled up his sleeves. "We take a look to see if she is starved for fuel," he announced. He leaned into the car's innards to make an adjustment. His voice came muffled: "Make mit der crank."

Dom pulled hard on the crank, once, twice, three times, but nothing happened. "You have tools?" Prince Rupert asked. From a compartment at the rear of the car Dom brought a tool kit in a leather roll. The prince selected a screwdriver and a wrench, and leaned far down into the intestines of the car, fiddling with the carburetor. "Make mit der crank," he ordered. But again the car would not start.

Fifteen minutes later Prince Rupert of Saxe-Coburg took a kick at a front tire, angry at the car, angry at himself. Both of his hands were smeared with oil. There was a great smudge of grease on the front of his shirt. He stepped back, his eyes narrowed, and he muttered imprecations in German, a language admirably made for potent profanity.

Marcy said in German, "Your Highness, since you have checked out the fuel system, what of the ignition? Remember how suddenly it stopped? Maybe some wire has come loose."

With an exclamation of approval, Prince Rupert leaned once more into the intricacies of the engine. He gave a muffled cry of triumph. His hand reached behind him, empty, and into it Marcy put a small spanner. The prince grunted, metal clicked and complained. He straightened up and thrust a skinned finger into his mouth. Around it he said, "Make mit der crank."

Warm and weary, Dom obeyed. To his surprised relief,

at the first pull the engine sputtered, choked, then settled down to a steady drone. Smiles brightened on the three faces. The prince listened a bit with his head cocked, then he motioned to Dom to shut the engine off. He wiped his dirty hands on the wad of clean rags Dom handed him. He said, "Frl. Tarrant, you were right—the earth—the ground wire had worked loose, and broke the circuit of the electric fluid. I tell you, you come to Gotha, I give you a job, assistant to Herr Landstaff. You know more about the motor car than most of my men."

Marcy laughed. "I will visit you some day, I promise. Moreover, I hope you will remember Tarrant Motors when you are assigning the American franchises for your Saxon-Benz."

"You have my word on it," he said, tossing the wad of dirty waste away. "Though that must wait until we get into goot production. Now, only five, six, maybe ten cars in one year."

Returning to the vast bulk of the Palace, they shunned the main entrance and entered by a side door, near the elevators. "To my rooms I must go," Prince Rupert said, looking ruefully at his grease-stained shirt front, his dirty hands, the oil on his cuff. His white tie had come awry and was dangling limply.

Yet Marcy saw that he was smiling, elated by the triumph over the recalcitrant runabout. He said, "I must go up and change before I am seen like this by our gracious hosts, and especially by my dear wife Lilli, who would scold me. But do not leave, Frl. Tarrant, Herr Renfrow. We must talk some more about the motor car, and exchange ideas about it."

Much later, as the Pope-Winston labored up the hill to the wide reach of Van Ness Avenue, Dom said, "Say, that prince is a real sport, isn't he? And he sure knows his onions about engines."

"He's not a stuffed shirt. As for the engine—" she gave Dom a reproving look. "He had an assist from Marceline Tarrant, if you'll remember."

"By George, you're right!" he exclaimed. "Marcy, you have the most amazing talents. I'm not sure the prince didn't mean it when he said he'd hire you for his factory in Gotha."

"Don't think I wouldn't like to go. They're doing things in Europe our people haven't tried yet. Maybe next year, if we get our car agency started. Dom, since you're an auto-

mobile buff, I wish you'd have a long talk with Daddy as soon as he is well enough. We might have an offer you'd find tempting."

"An offer? You can be sure I'll listen with both ears," he said, as he turned into Franklin Street. "I'm tired of my role as an office boy."

He stopped in front of the Tarrant home and turned off the ignition to avoid waking the neighborhood. He escorted Marcy up the steps. She saw that above the front door the stained-glass fanlight was illuminated from within. The door was unlocked, and he turned the knob and followed Marcy inside.

With an odd hesitancy, Dom said, "Marcy, I want to thank you for asking me. It turned out to be a perfectly swell evening. You know, I'm going to miss you like the very devil when you leave for college soon. You—you've become more important to me than—than anything. Even than my new motor car, and you're much prettier."

"I think because we both flaunt our red colors, your car and me," she teased. "I hope she isn't so weary that she'll give you an argument about starting."

"She'll start. It isn't every automobile that has a prince of the royal blood and a beautiful girl for mechanics," he said. He had not released Marcy's hand. Now he drew her to him and his arms went around her. She raised her face to accept his kiss.

His lips were warm, ardent, his hands gentle but firm. Yet with a clarity that almost shocked Marcy, she realized that Dom did not stir any physical response in her. She might be kissing some treasured relative, or a long-time friend. She knew she liked Dom, she admired him, they got along beautifully. She would hate to see him go out of her life. But she knew what passion could be, and Dom Renfrow didn't ignite a single spark of it. Angry at herself, she could not help thinking of another time, another man. Had Paul Costain ruined forever her chance to love?

Dom sensed her feelings, she was sure, for he released her and stepped back. Frowning, he looked at her in the hall light. He said, "No good, eh, Marcy?" His voice was harsh with disappointment.

"I'm afraid not, Dom," she said softly, touching his cheek with consoling fingers. "It should be—I'm very fond of you, we get along well, I admire you. But sadly, there's something missing. I don't know what. Maybe something is lacking

deep inside of me, in my character. Oh, Dom, I hate to hurt you. But I can't pretend a feeling that isn't there."

He captured her hand, held it. "I'm not sure I understand, Marcy, but I must accept your wishes. And I thank you for your kindness, your frankness. I'm not giving up, though. Marcy, my very dear, I won't press my suit. I'm praying, though, that the future will change things."

A great wave of sympathy swept over Marcy. "I hope you don't give up, Dom. My feelings may never change, yet I value your friendship, and you'll always be close to my heart."

"Brother and sister, eh?" he asked with intentional irony. "Still, if that's the best I can do, I'll treasure it. So on that glum note, I'll say good night, though not goodbye."

Impulsively she pulled his head down and kissed him warmly. "There, Dom, that's for—just good night. Things change, people change. I might. Who can read the human heart?"

She stood at the door. The Pope-Winston started, thrummed for a moment, then trundled away down the empty, silent street. The headlights flared as the engine accelerated, then as Dom slowed to turn the corner, she saw them dim again. An extraneous thought intruded into Marcy's mind: the designers would have to do something about that, so the lights shone with the same intensity at all speeds of the engine. Some kind of regulator, or booster device.

Pity the problems of people couldn't be solved that way, she thought as she went into the house and closed the door. She went to her room feeling rather sad, in spite of the stimulating evening. She hoped she hadn't dealt Dom a lasting hurt, for of all the men she knew, he was one of the few who truly deserved the name "gentleman." Certainly not Paul Costain, she thought with a flicker of anger.

Why can't I stop comparing all other men with Paul?

CHAPTER IX

From Boston, in late November, Marcy wrote her father:

It's great that you are getting along so well in your wheelchair and will soon graduate to crutches. No doubt Mary and Lulu are spoiling you rotten, just as I would. And it's simply grand that you are making such great progress with our new project. Write me all the details, I'm hungry for news.

Daddy, I've got to tell you I can't come the long way home for the holidays. My studies are proving tough, so I want to hit the books hard during vacation. I will miss you all, but I won't be too lonely. I'm invited to spend several days in New York with Barry Olden's parents—you know, my young motor car enthusiast. He's just as much a nut as ever about them.

I've only met the Oldens once, but they seem nice, and it sounds like fun, even though Barry is a sensitive soul and somewhat temperamental. We're going sleighing and skating, he says, and he will take me to a play I want to see—*L'Aiglon*, with Maude Adams.

There's nothing quite as exciting as San Francisco at holiday time, so I'm going to miss it terribly, and you and the girls and all. Time, though, flies on the wings of the wind, so in no time you and I and Aunt Dora will find ourselves on the ocean heading for Europe. I can hardly wait.

I love you much and much.

Your dutiful daughter,
Marcy

As Marcy sealed the letter, she regretted the decision she had to make. Her reasons were honest enough, though she had minimized the problems she had encountered at M.I.T., which many students called Boston Tech. As Mr. Tenniel had predicted, the instructors and professors seemed to harbor resentment at seeing women in those hallowed halls. Some of them were savagely hostile. They especially resented that a beautiful girl could possibly handle their difficult courses. Luckily Marcy had grown up in the tough world of

the construction camps, so she took their hazing in stride. Her good grace and her proven abilities were bringing some of them around.

The tough curriculum and the rigorous study requirements of M.I.T. had not proven easy for Marcy, but they were worse for Barry Olden. She had not mentioned it in her letter, but Barry needed help in his courses, needed it badly, so Marcy thought part of the holidays could be devoted to helping him. A mother-hen instinct, perhaps, she thought, but Barry was such a sensitive fellow, so battered by misfortune. . . .

Trying to help Barry, Marcy discovered a truism that she would encounter again and again in later life: Desire and ambition did not necessarily guarantee success for a man or a woman. A fabric could not be woven from dreams, unless the weaver owned the deftness to complete it. There was tragedy in the ambitious dreamer not equipped by nature with the fiber and sinew, the toughness essential to success.

That was the root of Barry Olden's troubles. He had fallen in love with this new toy, the automobile, using it to replace the family life and parental love he had lost so young. His interest had gone from a hobby to an obsession. Now, she feared, it was becoming a mania. He was so filled with his fixation he tired and alienated his few friends.

Reluctantly, Marcy recognized that Barry lacked the bent and the tools to implement his dreams. He had little manual dexterity, a handicap in lab work. He had an erratic memory, sometimes almost total recall, at other times painfully faulty. His belief in the sanctity of the printed word was awesome, in spite of Marcy's attempts to make him question, as she did, statement or theorem that she felt had failed.

She was with him often, stealing time from her own studies to help him. She found his summer had been fairly enjoyable, though he was quite uncommunicative about Miriam, his stepmother. He had come back to M.I.T. rested and properly fed, so he had done quite well at first. Now his work had slumped, and Marcy had to keep drumming at him to keep him above the failure level. The prospect of the holidays in New York with his parents and Marcy had turned his attention even farther from his studies. Shaking her head, Marcy told herself she would be patient until after midterms, then she'd see.

Early in December, Marcy eagerly tore open a letter from San Francisco. The new letterhead bore a cut of a motor

car, with *TARRANT MOTORS* emblazoned above it. Down the side she saw listed "Thomas Tarrant, Pres., M. N. Tarrant, V. Pres., Dominic J. Renfrow, Sec'y.-Treas." For a moment she was confused, then she realized that *she* was Marceline Norah Tarrant, the vice-president of this new motor firm! Eagerly, she read her father's letter:

Surprised, baby? We got together with Sandy Woodworth and incorporated our new business. We needed a vice-president, so you are it, though you're legally a minor until *a year from next April.* Sandy is sure that won't be challenged.

You'l' be pleased that I weaned Dominic away from Price, Morehouse. He jumped at the chance to get in on our business. Also I wooed Beulah Danaher, my good old secretary, away from Marshall-Osweiler-Tarrant, to come over to us. I'll bet Ed and Mal are sore about that, but I have to have letters with grammar in them, and the cuss words left out. By the way, the boys are doing fine, with a causeway job on the west Bay, and a highway bridge in Marin County.

It broke my heart, mavourneen, that you won't be home for Christmas, but it is a long trip, and you know best. Hope you have a fine time with the Oldens in New York.

About the building. Remember those lots we bought on Van Ness, when I was so flush after the Sky Lake job? Gonna build a mansion, I swore, to make those mansions along the avenue look like shacks. Well, I never did. So that's where our new offices and sales rooms and shops are going to be. I've let the contract for a new three-story building, to my specs. What do you think of your old man now?

I'm afraid some of the muckymucks who own those marble tombs and gingerbread fortresses along Van Ness may get their backs up about it, but there's already a swank hotel across the avenue, and a couple of new apartment houses. Our building will be handsomer by a **** sight than most of the atrocities that the rich boys have lined the Avenue with, even if the newspapers do call them palaces.

Tom Tarrant continued with details of the building, the shops, and his appraisal of the various makes of automobiles he and Marcy had considered for a franchise. *He's sharp,* Marcy thought fondly. *He has been studying his lessons as hard as I have. Between us, we'll be a team.*

Dom and I are working on a plan to take in older cars on new ones, then fix and resell the old ones. Also some

plans to finance customers, maybe long-terms or some such. I'll keep you up to date on those, also how the Oldsmobile agency deal is coming.

Say, mavourneen, the golden boys and girls are back from Down Under about two weeks ago. A lot of the story has been hushed up, but enough has leaked to let it out that they had one **** of a time. The schooner was dismasted in a storm off Tahiti, and Mrs. Johansen was lost at sea. They had the *Star* towed to Sydney and she was laid up for a month. The Stevens girl picked up a tropical disease, and the Huntingdon girl got in the family way. They both shipped home on a Royal Mail steamer.

We hear there were feuds and fisticuffs and more than a few miscellaneous mishaps. So none of the families are speaking to each other, and there are hints of lawsuits. I thank God neither you nor Patsy got embroiled in that disaster.

Thought you might like that bit of gossip to cheer you up. It did me, for I'm a nasty old man, who has nothing in the world for the Costains but the back of his hand.

Marcy put the letter down, thoughtfully. She could understand her father's attitude, for she was finding it only human to gloat a little over Paul's discomfiture. It was a suitably inglorious way for him to be punished for his sins. Marcy wondered if he was the one who sweet-talked Avis Huntingdon into going to bed with him. Then she told herself: *Come, Marcy, don't be jealous because she did what you did. She's paying for it.*

New England felt the bite of winter, and on December 20, when Barry and Marcy took the train to New York, the weather was raw and snowing. As the train sped South, Marcy had not entirely lost her misgivings about the visit, but was reassured when Barry seemed so delighted, so effervescent, that she put her doubts far in the back of her mind. Besides the skating and the play there was a motor show at Madison Square Garden, and a new Panhard Barry was mad to see.

They took a hansom cab from Grand Central Station to the new apartment building on Central Park West, where Barry's parents had recently moved. A uniformed doorman moved toward the cab with supercilious slowness, scarfed and gloved against the crisp air. Then he recognized Barry and his attitude changed to a heavy cordiality.

Inside, the grilled elevator took them slowly to the eighth floor with a whine of electric motors.

Marcy could see there were only two large apartments on the floor. A maid in a lace apron over crisp black taffeta opened the door. "Mr. Barry! So nice to have you home for the holidays. And—Miss Tarrant, isn't it? Mrs. Olden is expecting you both."

Barry led the way into the living room, which was decorated in the style fashionable this year—flowing curtains, statuettes, many pictures. Hardly a square yard of the handsomely papered walls was unfilled. Photographs large and small, watercolors, oil paintings, pen and ink sketches, silhouettes were in many cases signed by the artist. An impressive display, Marcy thought, but good Lord, how cluttered! And in the corner the height of fashion—an Oriental niche, oddly like a shrine, with ornate Chinese urns, dolls and fans and ivory statuettes.

Near the window Miriam Olden was stretched on a chaise longue. Seeing Marcy and Barry, she stubbed a perfumed cigarette out in an ash tray. She stood up, her movements graceful, and came to them, hands outstretched. She was beautiful, Marcy thought, but a bundle of nerves. She took Mrs. Olden's offered hand, heavy with diamond rings.

"So terribly nice, Marceline, that you could visit with us for the holidays," Miriam Olden said in her quick, silvery voice. She turned to Barry, enfolding him in a brief hug. She gave him a chaste kiss on the cheek. "You're looking fine, Barry," she said. "And ready for the festive season, I'm sure."

"We sure are, Miriam," Barry said. "There's a motor show at the Garden that we—"

But Miriam's attention had already faded. "I'm sure you'll have fun, dear." She lit another cigarette. The blue perfumed smoke drifted across Marcy's nostrils, and her nose wrinkled in an effort to suppress a sneeze. "Marcy, you'll have the blue bedroom, and Barry the green. Make yourselves right at home. If you're hungry, Francine will fix you a snack. We'll dine at seven, when your father gets home, Barry."

"We had lunch on the train coming down," Barry said. "And how have you been? How's Father?"

"Just fine, just fine, though he did have a siege of la grippe two weeks ago. Generously, he gave it to me too. We're both well now." With her graceful showgirl's stride she walked to the windows, turned and came back. With a

slight air of reluctance she said, "Barry, I'm sure you young people have a full round of entertainment planned. With that busy schedule I'm sure you won't mind if—well, if your father and I leave here the day after Christmas for a week with the Grosteins at their Carolina place. We'll be gone until after New Year's, so you'll have the place to yourselves. You'll have Francine and Brenneman to take care of you. You may use the victoria and Philbert any time you wish."

Marcy heard Miriam's news with a sinking feeling. It did not matter greatly to her that the departure of the Oldens would create an unconventional situation. She knew that could be handled sensibly. It was the knowledge that Barry's parents were abandoning him for the greater part of his vacation. That saddened her, for she knew the boy's longing these past weeks to enjoy a family atmosphere, to renew his attachment to his father. She saw that the cold, set expression on his young face told the whole story of his disappointment.

In a moment Barry had composed himself. He drew a deep breath, his tongue lightly touching his lips. "Oh, that's all right, Miriam. The warm air and the rest will be good for Father, he works too hard anyhow. Marcy and I do have a full schedule, as you say, and I suppose we would be so busy seeing New York you wouldn't see much of us anyhow."

Good for you, Barry, Marcy thought. *A neat recovery.* She said quickly, "You see, Mrs. Olden, you have so many things here we don't have in San Francisco. I'm thrilled at this chance to see them in such nice company." She put her hand on Barry's arm. "I understand New York is dreamland at Christmas."

"It is delightful, my dear, simply delightful," Miriam Olden agreed. "And our shops—you'll simply go mad when you see their Christmas offerings. You'll find everything in them, simply everything." She stubbed out the latest cigarette. "I'm sure you are anxious to get settled in." She touched a mother-of-pearl button set in the wall.

When the maid appeared, Mrs. Olden said, "Francine, help Miss Tarrant get settled in the blue room. Brenneman can take Mr. Barry's luggage to the green. Barry, there's an envelope on your dresser with the two tickets to *L'Aiglon.* I can report that it's perfectly charming."

As Marcy turned to follow the pert little maid to the bed-

room, she heard Mrs. Olden say, "And Barry, there's a new billfold you may have, beside the envelope. I told your father to be sure that it was well filled. New York is *such* an expensive place. If you take Marceline to Delmonico's for dinner, you'll hardly get by on less than fifteen dollars. I did hear that Louis Sherry is about to offer a full *table-d'hôte* for three dollars, but I'm sure that's only a rumor."

Dinner that evening was a solemn affair. Courtney Olden seemed somewhat ill at ease with his only son. He was very gracious to Marcy, and in spite of his outer coldness she found she liked him. Yet at times she had to bite her lip to keep from crying out at his inept course with Barry. Barry was not without fault, either. He was making a desperate attempt to establish a rapport with his father, but had a positive genius for doing it the wrong way.

The pleasant meal was nicely prepared and served, but Marcy did not entirely enjoy it. It was a trait of Miriam's to murmur constantly in the presence of Courtney Olden. Though Francine, the maid, and Brenneman, the butler, were polite and deft, they could not suit Miriam, fretful and impatient. The wines, Marcy recognized, were of excellent vintage, yet Miriam sent one bottle back as though they were in a restaurant.

Courtney Olden cut the unpleasantness short. He turned to Marcy. "Miss Tarrant, I understand you share my son's enthusiasm for that new toy, the motor car."

Marcy nodded. "That's right, Mr. Olden. Except that it isn't a toy. The motor car and the internal combustion engine promise to revolutionize all transportation. With my father, I intend to obtain the Pacific Coast dealership for several of the best makes."

Courtney Olden's expressive eyebrows went up. "So? A friend of mine is just back from Europe with a new Daimler. He has become an automobile fanatic. In his opinion, if we don't invest in this fledgling business, we will be missing the chance of a lifetime."

"I do believe he's right," Marcy said. "My father and I consider it a most lucrative field. We're staking our future on it. We feel the business will be very rewarding to those who get in on the ground floor. Mr. Olden, we think that the motor car will replace the horse-drawn vehicle within thirty years."

"Hm-m-m. You present a strong case, young lady. I do believe I'll quiz my friend more fully, even take a ride in his

stinkwagon. By George, a boy raised on a farm as I was knows how inefficient our four-footed friends are."

"Steel and brass and rubber don't tire, Father," Barry said. "And an auto doesn't eat when it's not working. You just wait and see, the whole world will ride on rubber tires turned by gasoline engines. If I had a few thousand dollars, I'd start my own factory, and—"

His father interrupted him with a hearty laugh. "No, no, my boy, your ambitions outrun your abilities. After you've acquired an education, say in five years, then I'll see. Things may look different to both of us by then."

"Maybe five years too late," Barry said morosely.

"Barry, you want everything to come at once. You must have patience always," Olden said.

"There's something in what he says, Mr. Olden," Marcy said. "A firm foothold at the beginning may result in a commanding position when others are just getting started."

"You're young too, Marceline," Courtney Olden said indulgently. Marcy thought she caught a tinge of impatience in his voice. "One of the basic precepts of business is to let the other man sink the risk capital, make the mistakes, and when he has lost his shirt, step in and take over. But enough of shop talk. I think Miriam has an announcement of some importance."

"Oh, dear, yes! I'm so happy about it. Children, we're all invited to a pre-Christmas levee at the deFoxes—you know, the railroad deFoxes." Her patrician face was animated as she tinkled her little silver bell for dessert. "When Adeline deFoxe learned you two would be here, she made a point of including you. A very grand affair. Eveyone who is anyone will be there. You'll enjoy it."

Barry looked skeptical. "A party in that great stone tomb of hers? I'm not sure Marcy and I—will there be other young people there?"

"Of course there will," Miriam said, frowning in displeasure at Barry's reluctance. "From the most important families in New York. Adeline deFoxe, you know, is a devotee of the stage, so there will surely be some well-known people from the theater."

Marcy recognized the stubborn set of Barry's jaw. To avoid a scene she said quickly, "Why, that sounds very exciting. I'd love to have Barry take me there, if he'll break down his stern disapproval."

Miriam smiled, Barry frowned, and Courtney Olden

stayed elaborately neutral. Francine came in with the mousse and the tension eased. Marcy was happy that calm prevailed while they had crème de menthe and petit fours in front of the blazing fire in the living room. Courtney Olden of course had Courvoisier and a panatela.

Barry and Marcy spent the next day at the automobile show. By now they felt themselves quite expert on carburetors, brakes, clutches and transmissions. Marcy was astonished at the progress in design and construction since the earlier shows. The motorized buggy had almost disappeared. Here was a new conception of transportation, and machines were being built to carry it out. Though some of them were, Marcy commented to Barry, " 'turned to something rich and strange.' Some of these concepts are positively weird."

They rode back to the Central Park West apartment by trolley, weary but enthusiastic. Marcy bathed and put on the green velvet that looked so well on her. She did not want to antagonize Miriam Olden by appearing so modish that the older woman would resent it, yet she refused to play the role of provincial ingenue.

She must have walked the chalk line correctly, for Miriam's smile was merely slight as she inspected Marcy. Her own gown was striking, a brilliant red satin. And Miriam was corseted in the newest S-curve mode, which thrust the bosom forward and the hips back. This accentuated Miriam's firmly adequate breasts.

"You look lovely, child," she said. "Like a college girl, not too sophisticated, yet able to cope with the world. Barry, come here, you've made a mess of your dress tie. I'll fix it for you. We don't want Mrs. deFoxe to think you're a country bumpkin, now do we?"

As Miriam fussed with the tie, Barry looked over her head, and gave Marcy a pantomime of patient long-suffering.

CHAPTER X

The Oldens' victoria rolled smartly through the snowy streets. Crossing Central Park, it moved past the great Whitney house at Sixty-Eighth Street, and shortly came to the tall, Italianesque mansion of Adrian and Adeline deFoxe. Philbert the coachman brought the carriage to a halt under the porte-cochere and the doorman opened the door. As she stepped out, Marcy saw why Barry had described the house as "a great stone tomb." It was massive, its masonry a chill gray with ornate stone carving at windows and doorways. Four stories high, it could well have been some state building gracing a narrow crooked street in Rome—a mayoral mansion, perhaps, or an embassy. Marcy thought it lacked any of the touch of lightness ordained by the architects of even the most opulent of homes in San Francisco.

The Olden party disposed of their wraps and went up the curving staircase of marble to the main ballroom. In a stentorian voice, the head butler announced: "Mr. and Mrs. Courtney Olden, Mr. Barry Olden, and Miss Marceline Tarrant." Heads turned for only a moment, then the various knots of people went back to their discussion of politics and other trivia.

For a party described as "small," Marcy thought, it was all quite grand, at least by her standards. It was subdued, and the string ensemble played more softly. The flowers were in artistic clumps instead of banked in overpowering masses. The men were in somehow crisper black and white, the women were dressed modishly but not ostentatiously.

Marcy was introduced to Mrs. deFoxe. She greeted Marcy cordially in an unaffected manner. Her rope of pearls glowed softly in the light of the crystal chandeliers, and she wore only a single pearl and diamond ring on her left hand.

"So kind of you to come, Miss Tarrant," Adeline deFoxe said. She asked about college and murmured something about other young people from Harvard and near Boston and urged Marcy to have a splendid holiday.

The Oldens wandered away, Barry disappeared somewhere,

and Marcy found herself alone. She sipped a glass of champagne, watching the colorful crowd. She smiled as she noted the graceful, inobtrusive movements of the ubiquitous Mrs. deFoxe, and compared her with Cleopatra Costain.

"Your thoughts, young lady, seem to be pleasant ones," a man's voice said in a clipped English accent. Turning, Marcy saw a tall, blond young man. His eyes sparkled as he smoothed the sweep of his yellow mustache with the knuckle of a forefinger. "I think they must be worth sharing. I'm Denis Howerth."

"The thoughts are Marcy Tarrant's. This being my first encounter with New York society, I was making some comparisons with things in my own San Francisco."

"Ah, San Francisco, a city I've never seen, though I greatly long to so do. Y'see, Miss Tarrant—it is Miss?—I manage New York several times a year on business for our firm. But try as I may, I haven't managed an excuse to cross the continent. There always seems to be some urgent reason for catching the next liner home."

"And your business is—"

"Luton Machine Works. We make machine tools, lathes, shapers, drills, milling machines, routers, and all such. We make looms as well, and textile and shoe machines. Hat machines too. I'm afraid I must say we make the finest machines of all those sorts in the entire world."

Marcy laughed delightedly. "It's refreshing to meet a man who knows his own worth. You have, I'm sure, a large engineering staff. Tell me, Mr. Howerth, what is the attitude in England toward lady engineers?"

He stared at her doubtfully. "You're serious? I'm afraid I've never known a lady engineer. If I knew what you were driving at—"

"Nothing, really. I'm in my first year of engineering study at M.I.T., so I'm filing away leads for employment when I graduate three years from now."

He shook his head. " 'Strawdinary. A pretty girl like you. I'm afraid you've caught me leg before wicket. For myself, I'd say an engineer from a good school like M.I.T., if qualified, could design a drophammer or a jacquard loom no matter what the sex. I must say, though, that my large engineering staff is completely male. And I would hazard the guess that they would prefer that I hired the devil himself rather than a woman. I don't doubt they would—what's your American expression?—make things damned tough on her."

"I thought that might be your answer," Marcy said. "Oh well, in my case, it would be three years before that embarrassing dilemma faced you. Moreover, instead of lathes and drills, my studies are oriented toward the new plaything of tycoons and princes, the motor car."

There was new interest on his face. "Come, Miss Tarrant, out with it—what *is* your opinion of the horseless carriage?"

"It's the most important invention since steam. It's going to change the whole world."

"And how many years will the revolution take?"

"That depends on many things. But to go out on a limb, twenty years. At the most, thirty."

Howerth glanced around conspiratorially. Leaning close, he said, so softly it was barely audible over the muted music: "Miss Tarrant, you have reached the same conclusion that a team of my engineers has come to after four years' work. Please don't repeat this, but Luton Machine is watching developments very, very closely. My staff and I are of the same mind."

"You'd begin manufacturing cars?" Marcy asked.

He shook his head. "No, too risky. Great fortunes to be made, no doubt, but as many lost. Our business, Miss Tarrant, is to make machines that make things, including other machines. The motor car makers will need such machines, millions of pounds worth of them. And Luton Machine will build them. We'll prove once more that we design and build the best machine tools anywhere."

Marcy nodded. "I follow you. It will take machines. Mr. Howerth, I foresee automobiles, and motor omnibuses, and powered wagons—being built in the tens and hundreds of thousands, even millions. If you're there the fustest with the mostest—"

He was giving her a puzzled look when Mrs. deFoxe hurried up. She took his arm. "Ah, there you are, Lord Wolverton," she said. "Miss Tarrant, may I? Some people just came in that Denis had asked to meet."

Marcy's green eyes met the blue eyes of the young Englishman. "Lord Wolverton?" she asked, a bit sharply.

He grinned. "That's for officialdom. To my friends, I'm Denis Howerth. May I count you among them?"

"You may, since I forgive you, Denis," Marcy said.

Midnight was approaching when Courtney Olden and his wife found Marcy, rounded up Barry, and with muffled yawns, prepared to leave. Barry had been deep in conversation with

a man in white uniform heavy with the glittering gold braid of an admiral. They thanked Mrs. deFoxe, said good night, and went out to the Olden victoria.

On the way home through falling snow, Barry explained that the admiral had been telling him about the installation of steam turbine drive in navy ships. "Maybe some day they'll put turbines into automobiles," Barry said.

The horses trotted briskly with muffled hoofbeats through almost deserted streets. Marcy was suddenly weary, yet was amused by Miriam Olden's reaction to the deFoxe levee. "Dear Adeline always does things so nicely," Miriam said. "And the people she finds—I don't know how she does it. The Whitneys were there, of course, and Admiral Rowan, Barry's new friend. I chatted with Chauncey Depew quite at length. I wanted to talk to Ethel Barrymore—dear Ethel, but she was always in a crowd. And that charming Englishman, Lord Wolverton. Did you meet him, Marcy?"

"Yes. We had a most pleasant few minutes," Marcy said. "I found him interesting, and quite democratic, for a lord." Marcy knew she was laying it on a bit about Denis Howerth, but she was annoyed at Miriam's superior air. *Pretty good for a little country girl, eh, Miriam?*

The next day, Barry seemed to be relieved that the deFoxe gala was behind him. He was in a pixie mood. He and Marcy went shopping, and over her protests, at Tiffany's he bought her a star sapphire pendant. "Got to get rid of the old man's shekels one way or another," he said, grinning.

Down the street, the two stood in the crisp wintry air and watched a fat chef flip pancakes in the show window of Childs Unique Dairy Lunch Room. Laughing, they went inside and devoured an excellent lunch.

Snow was falling again as they came out and started along the street to Simpson, Crawford & Simpson and bought presents. They rode on the new escalator. They took a chance and stood in line for the matinee at the Casino Theater, and by luck got two seats high up in the gallery. They munched bonbons from Maillard's and watched a sparkling *Floradora*. They wildly applauded the famous sextet, and cheered for the dancers.

When Barry and Marcy came out of the theater, the snow had stopped. The world was cleanly white, the air sharp. They walked north, Barry humming, "Tell me, pretty maiden—"

As they reached the far side of Times Square, Barry

stopped suddenly. His hands on Marcy's shoulders, he turned her to face him. "Marcy, Marcy, it's Christmas Eve!" he cried. His arms went around her and he kissed her ardently on the lips. More than a little startled, she let her warm lips respond to his kiss. *Not romance,* she thought, *but I must share his ebullience. After all, it* is *Christmas Eve.*

In an exalted mood, they walked up the crowded street in the gathering dusk, carrying gaily wrapped packages. They ignored the clanking, crowded streetcars, and decided it was useless to battle the crush for one of the few hansoms. So they swung along the edge of the Park, exhilirated by the day, the intoxicating air, and the stage fairyland they had seen. The trees in Central Park were bare and crooked of limb against the snow, the slopes filled with children sledding, bundled in bright scarves and mittens and furry hats.

At the apartment building, Gregg, the doorman, gave them a warm smile and a "Merry Christmas." The elevator man, Louie, grinned and saluted them. Brenneman, too, greeted them warmly, and brought hot toddies. When the Oldens came in a bit later, Courtney Olden, rubbing his hands together said, "Say, that looks good, Brenneman. Pour me one." And Miriam had one too, obviously wanting it but constrained to regard it as rather plebeian.

Watching Barry, Marcy saw that the euphoric mood of the afternoon was heightened by this warm family gathering. He was expansive and witty as he told of their adventures. At the mention of *Floradora* Mrs. Olden's expressive nose again wrinkled, but she did not interrupt.

"So glad you two enjoyed your day," she said, when Barry finished. "Now Marceline, this evening—it's the Olden custom to open gifts on Christmas Eve, to leave the morning free. Place them in the pile below the crèche. At nine o'clock, after a light collation, Santa will come—imaginary, of course, since Courtney doesn't have the figure for it. And sadly, no Christmas tree, the fire hazard, you know. My darling crèche will serve well enough. I brought the lovely thing from Germany three years ago. Dresden, you know. Now I must ask, are you a church-goer? If you are—"

Marcy shook her head and said she could forgo church easily.

"I'm afraid we're very poor church-goers," said Miriam. "We do, of course, give generously to St. Kilda's, but the minister—well, I thought if you really wanted to go—"

"I'll enjoy a nice quiet evening at home," said Marcy. She

wondered how the minister at St. Kilda's looked on divorced people in his worldly flock.

Secretly, she would have enjoyed Christmas services. At home she always accompanied the Laughlin side of the family, devout Catholics, to Midnight Mass. (As a Protestant, Tom Tarrant distinguished himself by inattention to religious matters; he lacked Orange zeal.) Now it seemed more politic to avoid being considered whimsical by Miriam.

At supper, Courtney Olden was in a nostalgic mood, recalling the Christmases of his childhood. Marcy gathered that the Oldens had been farmers of good stock, hardly wealthy until Courtney had made good in business. His new wealth, she suspected, had done much to break up his first and second marriages.

Courtney's expansive attitude continued when they moved into the living room, where a log fire blazed cheerfully in the fireplace. Marcy thought his mood might stem from the earlier toddies, the potent Madeira at supper, and a generous balloon snifter of Hennessey brandy now. Whatever the reason, she could see Barry absorbing the warmth of his father's presence like a cat in a sunlit window. The young man was making the most of his father's rare joviality.

When Courtney Olden passed out the presents, they proved well-chosen, lovely, and expensive. Miriam Olden seemed pleased with a coat of marten fur with a cape collar, and a brooch and matching ring of fire opal. To Barry went a new watch, a platinum-cased toy that told the date as well as the time, and could be used as a stopwatch as well. Marcy loved her sapphire pendant, though she thought it too rich a present for a mere house guest. She would not hurt Barry by saying that.

Miriam and Barry had surprised Courtney with a new Berliner gramophone. He was as excited by it as a child with a new and complicated toy. There were a number of records with it, and the group sat around the fireplace, after the gifts were opened, to listen to the music, which the machine reproduced with excellent clarity and adequate volume.

Marcy listened with only a part of her mind, for she was badly disappointed by two things. The first was the aching hurt of Paul's neglect. Christmas is the time of resolving old quarrels, of patching lovers' misunderstandings, of soothing wounds and starting anew. Paul could easily have got her address from Tom Tarrant, and the Laughlins knew where she would be. Yet nothing from Paul—no present, no spray of

roses, not even a card. She shook her head, feeling again the hurt of his defection.

And her father. On this day when a girl missed father and family more than any other day in the year, Tom Tarrant had let her down. The silence from his direction was as complete as from Paul's. Maybe he had sent something to Boston —but no, he knew she'd be with the Oldens. He had the New York address.

Marcy imagined all kinds of reasons why she hadn't heard from her father, some of them frightening. Her worry increased when the door chime rang, and the maid came back with a telegram.

"For you, Miss Tarrant."

With shaking fingers Marcy tore open the envelope. She smoothed out the form under a desk lamp.

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. DEC. 24, 1900
MARCELINE TARRANT
C/O COURTNEY OLDEN
NEW YORK, N.Y.

MERRY CHRISTMAS MAVOURNEEN STOP WHEN YOU RETURN TO BOSTON SEE JOHN O'BRIEN AT SHAMROCK MOTOR GARAGE SEVENTY BOYLSTON STREET STOP HE HAS KEYS TO YOUR CHRISTMAS PRESENT STOP ENJOY YOUR NEW PLAYTHING BUT DRIVE WITH CARE BECAUSE YOUR FATHER LOVES YOU MUCH AND MUCH

THOMAS TARRANT

Marcy gave a great sigh of relief, finding tears warm in her eyes as she read the telegram aloud to the Oldens.

Barry jumped up excitedly. "Hey, do you get it, Marce? The Shamrock Garage has the agency for the Panhard Company. It's the biggest auto salesroom and shop in Boston. I'll bet my boots that you're the owner of a new Panhard motor. How lucky can a girl be?"

Marcy wiped the moisture from her eyes. "Oh, that wonderful, wonderful papa of mine!" she exclaimed.

Miriam said doubtfully, "That's a dangerous thing to give to a young girl. I'm not sure your father is being wise."

"Now, now, Miriam, don't be a prophet of gloom," Courtney Olden said. He cranked the gramophone, put on a new record, and set the needle in the outer groove. Adjusting the horn, he said, "I don't see why a young woman like Marcy

can't prove herself as good a driver as a man. Maybe better."

"But if she has a breakdown—" Miriam began.

"Nothing to it. She'd just stand beside her machine looking helpless, and there would be half a dozen men working to fix it," Olden said, chuckling. "A girl as pretty as Marcy in distress—you can damned well believe that *I'd* stop, for one." The strains of "After the Ball" filled the room, Marcy's song and Paul's. But her nostalgia about it was displaced this time by the wonder of owning a new motor car.

Marcy couldn't sleep easily that night. The car—the car—she was tempted to cut her visit short and return to Boston. That would leave poor Barry alone, his parents off to Charleston. She could not be so cruel. She consoled herself with the thought the Boston streets were in all probability too snow-packed and icy to drive on, anyhow.

Christmas was a lazy day, with the senior Oldens gone calling. By noon Barry and Marcy had listened to both sides of every gramophone record at least twice. Marcy said, "Let's bundle up and go over to the park. It's too nice to stay in."

Warmly dressed, they crossed the avenue to Central Park. It was a bright, sunny day, though the air was crisp. The snow was dazzling white, not yet made dismal by the splashing of traffic and the soot of coal fires. On the lake, skaters swooped and swirled.

"Let's try it, Marce," Barry said. At the warming house he rented skates and helped Marcy get hers on. She was not entirely a tyro, for basketball, sleighing and skating had been almost the only winter amusements at Miss Spofford's. With her excellent coordination she caught the rhythm of it quickly, and she and Barry were soon gliding along as fluently as some of the more experienced skaters. Whenever Marcy felt her balance going, she would clutch the arm of the expert Barry.

They were pleasantly weary, red of cheek, and monstrously hungry when they went back to the apartment. Since Brenneman had the day off to be with his own family, Barry mixed the toddies. Francine was fixing supper when the Oldens returned, Miriam smelling strongly of cigarette smoke, and Courtney of expensive bourbon. After dinner the four tried to play whist; a few hands played, Courtney Olden yawned and said, "I'm hopeless tonight. Come, Miriam, our train leaves early. Let's call it a day."

The large apartment seemed strangely empty the next day after the Oldens had left. After he had said his farewells to his

parents, Barry was morose and quiet. Hoping to shake him out of it, Marcy begged him to take her to the Metropolitan Museum.

It seemed to work. Barry's mood lightened as they wandered from room to room, from exhibit to exhibit. Barry had spent many lonely hours here, Marcy realized, for he knew a great deal about the museum, and had his favorite statues, pictures, urns and sarcophagi. She was pleased at his dark mood being dispelled, for she had decided that if it were not, she must make up an excuse and return to Boston. She was fond of Barry, she sympathized with him in his depression, yet she did not feel that it was her place to cope over and over with his shifting moods.

That evening Barry took her to dinner at Delmonico's, in the handsome building at Fifth Avenue and Forty-Fourth Street. They enjoyed a leisurely dinner, the table bright with crystal, snowy of linen. The waiters were deft and expert. Barry showed off his knowledge of wines; Marcy had oysters and roast duck. At the end Barry insisted on ordering a dessert of cherries jubilee flambé. It proved almost too much, but Marcy managed to eat it all.

The week went on in a kaleidoscope of activity. They visited the American Museum of Natural History. They went to the Public Library, soon to be housed in a magnificent new building already under construction. They rode the Staten Island ferry, and the El, the horse cars and the rattling, booming subway. They took the boat trip to Bedloe's Island, and climbed the Statue of Liberty.

One night they dined at Sherry's and went on to the Knickerbocker Theater to see *L'Aiglon*. Maude Adams was marvelous in the title role. Another evening Barry took her for Chinese food in Pell Street, and on to the opera at the Metropolitan, where the great Jean de Reszke performed in *Aïda*. Marcy was swept away by the ballet directed by Albertieri.

They skated again, lunched at the Waldorf, dined at Rector's. They went to the New York Theater to see the *poses plastique* of Mlle. Lotty, in which this lady appeared to be nude, but was not. Which matter Marcy and Barry discussed over lobster at the Café Savarin.

In this enjoyable, carefree interlude, Marcy grew to know Barry Olden as she would a brother. She found him a creature of moods which raised him up in the clouds one minute, down into some hell of his own making the next. Marcy

learned how to sustain his happy moods. Usually when he was growing morose, she would josh him out of it or switch into a new activity. In some areas he showed an intense intelligence, yet it annoyed her that in other areas he would not concentrate.

She thought often of Paul Costain. It had been only twelve months before that Paul had given her this same kind of rush. There was a difference—that span of days with Paul had sent her into an ecstatic world of fantasy. This year's-end did not. She felt a deep attachment to Barry, she felt protective of him. Knowing his desperate need for shelter from the cruel inconsistency of the world, she found herself over and over deferring from her own needs and wishes to shelter him.

New Year's was to prove ridiculously anticlimactic. On the last day of the year Barry appeared with a runny nose, a persistent cough, and a general malaise. After one glance Marcy prescribed a day of rest, hot toddies, a camphorated oil rub, and a diet of soup and crackers.

He protested, "It's a shabe to spoil Dew Year's this way. Baybe I'll be all ride by eveding. I'll take you out to didder. Thed we'll go to Tibes Square to see the dew year cub in."

"We'll stay right here," Marcy said sternly. "When midnight strikes we'll open the window and listen to the whistles and the bells and the fireworks. Then we'll doctor you some more and tuck you into bed. I want you pert as a daisy when your folks get home, do you hear?"

After a nap Barry was feeling better, though not well enough to go out in the evening. In robe and slippers, he sipped hot lemonade lightly laced with whiskey while he played Russian Bank all afternoon, crowing when he won two dollars from her. He ate quite well of a light supper.

More cards; then at ten Marcy sent him to bed. She promised she would wake him to greet the New Year. She sat reading a book from the Oldens' large library, not displeased to be quietly relaxed after the exciting week.

Then at a quarter to twelve she aroused Barry, who seemed much improved. She called the maid Francine to join them and the three of them waited.

In time for the stroke of midnight, Marcy and Francine flung open the windows that looked out over the city. Now in the sharp cold air came a cacophony of bells, whistles, sirens, chimes and firecrackers, a distant boom of cannon. The din ranged from treble to bass, low notes growling

from the foghorns of the liners along the Hudson River piers, the high notes shrilling from the little whistles of small factories.

Almost dreamily, Marcy contrasted this night with the glamour of a year ago at the Nautilus Ball. That had begun the wild ecstatic adventure with Paul. So many things had happened in those short twelve months, so very many. Now here she was with a different man, in a different setting, in a different city three thousand miles from San Francisco, from her father, from Paul Costain.

The clangor of the bells diminished, the whistles grunted and were silent. She motioned to Francine, and they shut the windows before Barry caught more cold. Francine disappeared. In moments she returned, carrying on a tray a tall bottle and two crystal goblets.

"Mr. Olden told me to serve this at midnight," she said.

Marcy smiled at the girl. "We'll wait until you get another glass for yourself," she said.

The girl looked at her questioningly, then, her eyes bright, she hurried to get a third goblet.

Carefully Marcy popped the cork, and poured the golden Veuve Clicquot. The three of them raised their glasses high. "May 1901 be the very best of years for all of us," Marcy toasted. She touched her glass to the others, and drank. She refilled the glasses.

"To the automobile, may it win the world and make Tarrant Motors rich," Barry croaked, and they drank again.

For the third and final glass, Francine made the toast: "To *la France*, and *l'Amerique*, and *à nous!*"

Barry emptied his glass, gathered his robe around him, and went to the gramophone. He wound the machine, and without checking the label of the record, he lowered the needle to it. The music started, that sad ballad of unrequited love, "After the Ball." Humming the melody, Barry reached out his empty glass. "Hey, that's great stuff," he said. "Feel better a'ready. Bring us 'nother bottle, Francine."

Marcy was about to protest, then she found herself agreeing that this was wonderful stuff. A cork popped in the kitchen, and Francine came hurrying back with a new bottle.

By the time that was empty, Barry was a little maudlin and getting sleepy. Francine was alert but giggly. Marcy was feeling simply wonderful.

Moving a little unsteadily, Francine took the empty bottles and the glasses to the kitchen. She called a muffled

good-night, and Marcy heard the maid no more. She supposed Francine had retired to her own small room at the end of the hall. Marcy had an impulse to talk to Barry, to tell him of all the noble things, the exciting things spinning in her mind. But her voice must have been hypnotic, for she saw his eyelids growing heavier and heavier. She put an arm behind his shoulders and urged him to his feet. Propping his faltering footsteps, she steered him to his room. She shucked him out of robe and slippers, and tumbled his nightshirted body into his bed. Gently she covered him with sheet and blanket, and tiptoed out as he began to snore lightly.

Full of joyful and hopeful thoughts, Marcy sat in front of the dying fire, too wide awake to go to bed. She considered a thousand thoughts, most of them trivial, suspecting that in the morning she would be hard put to remember a single one of them. At last the fire was only embers, the night beyond the windows was silent as a country churchyard.

In the blue bedroom, she undressed and put on a nightgown and robe. She went into the bathroom, which was between the blue and green bedrooms, serving both. Lazily, in spite of the hour, she washed and brushed her teeth and began the ritual of brushing her hair, cut to the fashionable mid-length style.

She smiled at her face in the mirror, pleasantly relaxed from champagne. *You're a darned pretty woman, Marceline,* she told herself. Paul Costain must have thought so too. As she pinned back her hair, she could hear him whisper, "Redhead, you're beautiful." That was so long ago.

At that moment she heard an odd sound from the door on the side of the green bedroom. She went to it and put her ear against the panel. Startled, she knew that the sound was Barry crying.

Without hesitation she turned the bolt and opened the door. In the small night light she had left on when she put him to bed, he was lying with his face buried in the pillow, his strong young body racked with sobs.

She sat on the edge of the bed and put a hand on his shoulder. "Barry! Barry dear! What's the matter? Are you ill?"

His body twitched. He mumbled, "G'way, Marcy. I'm all right. Le' me alone."

"I'll not go until I find out what's troubling you," she said, feeling a great wave of sympathy engulf her. He was so young, so vulnerable. "Please, Barry, tell me."

He rolled over and looked at her, the glisten of tears on his cheeks. "Go away, Marcy. You mustn't become a victim of the curse that's followed me all my life. You—you're too sweet to deserve that."

She took his hand in both of hers, and he did not pull away. "Tell me, Barry, what devil plagues your nights and haunts your days?"

He groaned. "Marcy, I'm a pariah. I spoil the lives of people I touch. They don't love me, they don't even like me. My mother—my real mother—she must have hated me. I loved her, Marcy, but she abandoned me like a dead dog. Miriam hates me like poison, behind that simpering face of hers. My father—he pretends too, but if I drowned or was hanged he would be relieved. I know he would. And you've seen how the fellows acted at Wickham Square, and how the men at M.I.T. treat me with contempt. Marcy, the whole world makes fun of me, except you, except you."

"Barry, you're imagining things," she soothed. "I'm sure lots of people would like you if you'd let them. As for your father and stepmother, I know they love you sincerely."

"They do?" He raised himself on an elbow. "Then why did they run off and leave me as fast as they could, when this is the only time I'll have at home until next summer? House party, they said, but the truth is, 'Get away from that stupid kid, Barry.' I can hear Miriam. A nobody, a rotten nobody, that's me. Marcy, dear Marcy, you're the only one in all the world who gives a good God damn about me. And I love you for it."

His head dropped back on the pillow, and he turned his face away. His shoulders shook with silent sobs. Marcy touched him, feeling sorry for him as she had never felt sorry for anyone in her life.

The impulse that struck her then was compounded of many things, her long night thoughts, her homesickness, the bitter memories of Paul and his defection. Poor Barry was hungry for love, real love; Marcy could give him that. The act of physical love with Paul Costain turned her from a girl into a woman. Perhaps she could turn Barry from a boy into a man. . . .

She stepped out of her slippers. She let her robe drop from her shoulders. Lifting the sheet, in her thin nightgown, she slipped into bed beside Barry. He moved away a little as if rejecting her, but she pressed closer, warming his body with the heat of her own.

"Barry, you need me," she whispered. "Come, turn this way, hold me close, make love to me."

He turned then. He put his hand on her shoulder, but with her free hand she took it and led it to the rounded fullness of her breasts under the silk of her gown. She heard his breath quicken. And with a surge of surprise, at his touch she felt her breasts responding to him, growing eager, taut. *Why, I'm enjoying this,* she thought. *He's not Paul, but he's so young, so clean, so abandoned. I'll help him. Maybe he'll help me.*

He said softly, brokenly "Marcy, I—I never have, I don't know—"

But instinct took over. His thighs pressed tight against hers. She reached down and slid the fabric of her nightgown higher on her body. She kissed him, hard, breathlessly.

"Don't fret, dear," she whispered. "I'll help you. Let nature take its course."

He was aroused now. Her hand found his penis rigid and thrusting. She stroked it gently, felt it respond. *He's ready,* she thought. She rolled slightly away so she could part her legs.

With a little cry, he thrust himself on her, one knee forcing her legs apart. She let them spread, and grasped his organ to guide it home. Then he cried out, his body jerked uncontrollably. Warm liquid splashed against her thighs and belly, over her hand. Involuntarily, she released him. *My God,* she thought, *this will ruin everything!* He'd think himself even less of a man than he had before.

Her hand reached down again, but instead of demanding maleness there was a flaccid impotence. Now it was a worm instead of a striking snake. Knowing it, he turned his back to her, denying her sympathy.

"Barry, I'm sorry," she said softly. "I didn't know I would excite you so quickly. My fault, please forgive."

"I'm no good, Marcy," he said hoarsely. "Not your fault —mine. I was like a little kid, wasn't I, having a wet dream in the night over the curly-haired doll three seats ahead. Marcy, don't think I don't appreciate what you tried to do for me. You're infinitely kind. But it's all no good. I'm cursed."

"That's all wrong, Barry," she said urgently. She got out of bed, found her slippers, and picked up her robe. "Don't worry about this, please don't. Get a good sleep and you'll have a new perspective in the morning. You'll feel better."

He mumbled something she could not understand, as she went into the bathroom and closed the door. She stripped and sponged her body. Before she went into her own room, she put an ear to the panel of the door, but heard no sound. In her room, she put on a fresh nightgown, turned out the light and slipped into bed.

It was a long time before sleep came. Her thoughts ran around and around in her tired brain like squirrels in a cage: *All you did, Marceline Tarrant, was to make things worse. Now the poor boy will be even more sure that he's hexed or hoodooed or damned. And anything I try to say will only compound my fault.*

She turned restlessly on the pillow, for strong in the back of her mind was the guilty knowledge that tonight's farce had not been for Barry. It had been for herself, an act of vicarious revenge on another man—Paul Costain.

CHAPTER XI

It is indeed a pretty thing, Marcy thought, walking around the Panhard. The car was a bright yellow with a red stripe, the two bucket seats upholstered in red leather. The wheels and the collapsible rubberized fabric top were black. The metal fittings gleamed brass or silver. She squeezed the rubber bulb of the volute ram's-horn and it gave a most satisfactory blat.

"How do you like her?" John O'Brien asked. They were in the large shop of the garage in Boylston Street. His pride was evident in his voice.

Marcy jingled the ignition keys in her hand. She was learning that there is no thrill quite like the first automobile one owns. She patted the sleek enamel of the hood, touched the cleated roundness of the tire with a toe, reached in and flicked a mote of dust from the red leather of the seat.

"She's a beauty," Marcy said. "John, when can we take her out?"

"Right now, Miss Marcy," he said paternally. "The snow is about gone downtown. Do you drive at all?"

"I have driven a little, in a Pope-Winston. But you'd better start from scratch. I'm sure that *my* car has some special features."

"Indeed it does. Matter of fact, this is the same model a feller named Charles Rolls has been winning road races with on the Continent. Of course he worked over the engine a bit."

O'Brien took the key from her and turned it in the switch lock. He set levers, moved the gearshift to neutral, and went around to crank. Explaining each step, he got the engine started and climbed in on the driver's side. One of the men opened the big door, and O'Brien let out the clutch on the Panhard and the little car rolled down the ramp, out into Boylston Street.

Detailing every move to Marcy, O'Brien drove carefully amid wagons, drays, carriages and cabs for several blocks, trying as much as possible not to frighten the horses. Though she was intent enough, Marcy missed a few points, she was so

proud of her machine. Head high, she smiled back at curious pedestrians.

O'Brien came back along another street and braked the car to a stop in front of the garage. He moved the lever to neutral and turned off the engine.

"Now it's your turn," he said to Marcy. "First, you must get her running." But before he would let her crank, he showed her the grip she must use to avoid having her wrist broken by a backfire.

She set the controls, turned the switch, and went in front to crank. The crank turned more easily than she expected, and the engine caught immediately. She got into the left-hand seat, settled her feet on the pedals, and looked at O'Brien.

"All right, clutch in, gear in first. Give her a bit of gas. Now let out the clutch, easy, easy."

Nervously she lifted her foot off the clutch pedal too abruptly. The Panhard snorted, bucked and came to a stop. She looked woefully at O'Brien. He was chuckling.

"Be kind with her, Miss Marcy, treat her gentle. Try her again, more careful-like."

This time the car eased out into the street smoothly. Tensely at first, her foot poised on the brake pedal, Marcy drove through traffic. She turned a corner into a less-traveled street, and tooled the car proudly along the damp pavement.

"Y'see, Miss Marcy, it's a matter of practice," O'Brien said. "The more miles you drive, the more your hands and feet will go through the motions all by themselves. As soon as the roads clear in spring, spend all the time you can with her. By fall you'll be an expert."

"Can I keep her in your garage when I'm not using the car?" Marcy asked, pulling around a hansom cab.

"Most certainly. Larry Joyce and my other men will keep her in tune and ready to use whenever you want her."

"Moreover, you'll have a pretty little machine to show to prospective customers," Marcy said, smiling at him.

"It takes an Irishman to understand the Irish, eh?" he said, laughing. "Sure and the thought entered my mind. If you have no objections."

"Perhaps I might demonstrate my car to customers, for a reasonable fee, of course," Marcy teased.

O'Brien took her seriously. "Now that's a great idea," he said. "It never hurts to have a pretty girl showing off our cars, especially to women. We'll have a talk about that one

of these days. Better turn around at this corner, Miss Marcy. We're running into a bit of ice."

A week of good weather, and John O'Brien checked Marcy out as a competent driver. Thereafter, when her studies allowed, she would take drives along the streets of Boston and Cambridge, sometimes alone, sometimes with her friend Evelyn Harkins. Later she was able to drive some distance into the country, as spring neared and the roads improved. With her good coordination, Marcy soon became quite expert; her chief worry was trying not to scare skittish teams of horses.

Only once did she have a breakdown bad enough so the Panhard had to be towed back to the Shamrock Motor Garage. A drive shaft failed. O'Brien's mechanics fashioned a new shaft out of bar steel, and the Irishman assured her that it was actually stouter than the original. In one of her weekly letters to Tom Tarrant, Marcy wrote:

> Daddy, I can't tell you how much I love my little car, what fun it is to own and drive it. I'm afraid there are times my studies suffer because I'm gallivanting around driving down some delightful country lane.
>
> Since as we agreed we would choose only two or three of the best makes for Tarrant Motors to handle, I find it hard to be objective about my Panhard. But I'll try to pass on my best judgment. My darling does have some faults. I mentioned the weak drive shaft. She has only two-thirds the power of Dom's Pope-Winston, and I notice that lack in her acceleration. Also I have to gear down on comparatively easy slopes. Her acetylene lamps are pure abominations. I would not consider Panhard unless they switch to electric lamps, like many American cars. One minor matter; for our market they would have to furnish a speedometer calibrated in miles per hour instead of kilometers.
>
> When we're in Europe this summer, you might want to visit Panhard-Levassor in France. But though I do like their Phenix-Daimler engine, we may find even newer developments we like. Somehow, a hunch more than anything, I have the feeling Panhard is not for Tarrant Motors.

Having her own automobile gave Marcy a kind of leverage in her association with Barry Olden. Three weeks of the semester had passed without a word from him, and she guessed that the misadventure of New Year's morning had affected the young man far more deeply than the incident

deserved. So, watching for him, Marcy caught him between classes and would not let him escape.

"Barry, you're being a silly, stubborn fool," she said bluntly. "That—well, accident—meant nothing. I'm as fond of you as I ever was. I've written it off, and I want you to do the same." She put a hand on his arm and looked into his eyes. "Darn it, Barry, the truth is that I've missed you like everything."

He avoided her searching glance, then she forced him to meet her eyes. His lips twisted then into a shaky smile. "Have you really, Marce? I felt like a nothing, some kind of freak, and I thought you felt that way about me too, just as Father and Miriam do. I just—I just couldn't face you."

"You'll forget such nonsense if I have to pound you black and blue," she said fiercely. "Barry, you haven't even seen my new car, my Yellow Peril. So come Sunday if the weather is decent. I'm going to take you for a long drive in the country. I won't take no for an answer, you hear? On top of that, if you start acting like the good friend I've missed, I'll teach you how to drive the Panhard."

"Golly, Marce, you will? Hey, that's peachy!" Here was the mercurial Barry again, reaching to grasp Marcy's hand. "Sunday's a date, then." He hesitated. "You're sure I'm forgiven for—"

"Of course, silly. I never want to hear another word about that episode. Now, how are your studies going?"

"Not too darn well," he said as they walked down the hall. "My grades are slipping, I know they are. Especially lab. Marce, some of this stuff I just can't get through my thick skull."

"Figure out where you need the most help, and I'll try to give you a hand," Marcy promised. "Not that I'm finding my own courses a breeze, but they say two heads are better than one."

"Even if mine is a cabbagehead, eh, Marce?" But he laughed for the first time, in his familiar bright way.

Marcy had her own small apartment near M.I.T., since the Institute had no dormitory for women. On this cool, almost chilly spring day, Barry appeared for Sunday breakfast bundled in fur coat and cap, muffler and gauntlets. By good fortune his mood was as sunny as the weather, and he did full justice to the ample breakfast Marcy had prepared.

The two had a marvelous day. The Panhard performed beautifully, the country roads were well packed where they

were snowy, and the air warmed to the point they could take the top down. Once, where a drift had thawed, the car did bog down, but with Barry's strong pushing, and Marcy's dexterous handling of the Panhard, the car was soon back on the road. Marcy had promised Barry a driving lesson, but with reluctance she had to postpone it to another day when road conditions were better.

As she drove along, she told Barry, "I have a lovely arrangement worked out with John O'Brien. When I'm not using my car the garage is permitted to use it for a demonstrator. And for practice in selling when Tarrant Motors opens, I took a customer out for a spin the other day. He was so impressed he bought the touring Panhard, and paid cash! John was so pleased he said no charges for garage, gas, oil or repairs from now on. When I wrote Daddy, he said I would be head of our sales department."

"I wish I could join you in San Francisco," Barry said wistfully. Then he brightened. "But, what do I see but a country inn ahead, with smoke rising from its chimney. And I'm starved. Pull up in front, Marce, I'll treat you to lunch."

The lunch at the inn proved excellent. After they came out, Marcy drove southeast. When they were still some distance from the city, she took a side road, and a mile along, turned north again on a narrow lane. Beyond a little bridge over a rill, the lane climbed steeply. Marcy downshifted, but the car began to labor and the wheels spun ineffectively. She stopped the car.

"Oh, dear, I'm afraid the Yellow Peril can't make it. And I did want to show you one of my favorite New England views. From the hilltop it should be a real winter wonderland, today."

"Maybe if I push and you drive—" Barry suggested.

"No. Oh, Barry, I forgot, John O'Brien put in some of those new-fangled tire chains. I haven't tried them yet, but if we can get them on, we'll find out if they're as good as John says."

It proved quite a struggle to get the chains locked on the rear wheels. Marcy had some misgiving when she put the car in gear and eased out the clutch, but the chains bit and the car ground steadily up the slope; the Panhard topped the hill, rumbling triumphantly, and Marcy stopped in a clearing, engine running.

She waved a gloved hand toward the wintry scene below. "Now isn't that worth our trouble?"

"Beautiful. If I could remember it, I'd recite *Snowbound,*" Barry said. It was straight out of Currier & Ives—the snowy whiteness in the clear air stretching to the far horizon, the few farmhouses scattered along the lanes, each house with its blue plume of wood smoke. Around the barns were dark patches where the farm animals had trod. Along the ribbon of a frozen creek woodlots lay green and blue-black. In the nearest farmyard, Marcy saw three children, tiny from this height, throwing snowballs and wrestling in the snow.

Barry looked at her. "Marcy, you don't know how much this day means to me. You're the only person who seems to understand me, who helps me with my problems. If only I hadn't acted like a damned fool and wrecked everything—d'you think we can put things back to the way they were before?"

"It already is, for my part," Marcy said. "I'll never forget that wonderful week, my New York Christmas. Barry, it was precious, and I'll remember it forever."

"I'll never forget it either," he said, with a shade of meaning she didn't like. Then he brightened. "Say, Marce, we had a heck of a lot better time, I'm sure, than Father and Miriam did in Charleston. I never got all of it—I didn't care, really—but apparently Father made goo-goo eyes at one of the girls and Miriam didn't like it. So they had a fight, and Miriam drank too much, and made a fool of herself with the brother of their host. There was something, too, about a bridge whist game that ended in a battle royal. They're not over their Southern sojourn yet. You wouldn't guess it, but my father is kind of like me; he takes some things awful hard. Only I show it, and he doesn't."

"Your stepmother rather intimidates me, Barry, but I like your father," Marcy said. "And I've seen him trying to be friends with you, and you making it hard for him. I wish you'd meet him half way. Both of you would be happier if you were friends."

"I know you're right," Barry said, frowning. "But Marcy, the feeling I'm nobody, that I'm not wanted—I guess that goes back to the time when I was just a kid and my mother, my real mother, just packed her things and pulled out. I knew they'd been fighting, I knew there was some other man. But Marcy, I loved her. To be unloved, abandoned, it's something I can't understand to this day. Since then I think I've been searching for love, and never finding it. It's a damned cruel world, Marcy, and you're the only one, the

only gentle soul—oh, I can't ask you to be the Atlas to carry the burden of my world on your shoulders, so the hell with it. I'm getting chilled. Let's go back."

Marcy leaned over and touched her cold lips to his cold cheek. She put the car in gear, backing and filling to turn around, using the greatest of care.

"This is no place to make a mistake," she said, pointing. "See that rickety fence? It guards the rim of an old quarry. Beyond the fence there's a vertical drop of almost two hundred feet."

"It's a darn good thing you're driving then," he said, with a little shudder.

Marcy laughed, and sent the Panhard down the hill the way they had come.

In the weeks that followed, Marcy sometimes grew exasperated at Barry. She felt that he was not making as much effort as he could to help himself. With her tutoring he did manage to wriggle through the semester with marks barely passing; Marcy at times had to neglect her own studies to help him. And after Easter his interest seemed to wane further with the passing of winter. Finally Marcy became so tired of pushing him, exhorting him, making him study, that in a rare fit of temper, she told him so.

"Oh, I know, I know, Marce," he said penitently. "I'm a rat, for sure. But spring is here, and I've got itchy feet. Father wrote me that something exciting was coming up, some kind of trip. I'm waiting to hear from him. If it means dropping out of school for a while, why, I'm game. I'm sick of books and I think they're sick of me."

"Barry, you're incorrigible," Marcy said sadly. "You have your mind set on that new Oldsmobile your father bought. You don't have a thought for anything else."

He grinned at her. "If I could just get my hands on that steering wheel! Thanks to you, I'm a pretty good driver. Father has a chauffeur, of course, but I'll wheedle the pater out of a chance to drive it one of these days."

"Now remember," she warned, "That's a big heavy car, not a light runabout like the Yellow Peril."

"A car's a car," Barry said with a shrug. "Father tells me his Olds will do fifty miles an hour on a good straight road. I'm just itching to find out."

When he left her apartment, Marcy went to the window and watched him stride down the street with the aplomb of a junior Napoleon. She shook her head. *I'll never really*

know him, she thought. *He's a strange young man. He has many loveable traits, and I do love him, but he is so erratic. I know he's fond of me, but since that night in New York he has never made the slightest move toward anything more than brotherly love. Not that I want him to sleep with me—or do I? Now confess that sometimes when you are close to that strong young body you have urges that no lady ever admits. A glass or two of Veuve Clicquot, and . . .*

Early one Saturday in May, Barry banged on the door of her apartment, and burst in, waving a letter. "Marce, what d'you think? Father's taking me on a cruise to South America. We'll hit Brazil and Chile and Argentina, then up the West Coast to San Francisco. Finally home by train. Ain't that sump'n?"

"That's marvelous, Barry," Marcy said. "Miriam is going, of course?"

"Yeah, I wish Father would leave old Skinny home, but I suppose that's no dice. Father has some banking business in Rio and Buenos Aires and Santiago. He will have to spend some time working, but I'll be as free as a bird. Only I s'pose I'll have to squire Miriam around most of the time. Oh well, she is a good-looking wench in her way. The natives will go for her. Marcy, we leave next Sunday!"

"Before finals?" Marcy asked, frowning. "Barry, you'll lose a half year of credits, you know that."

"Who cares? My grades aren't all that good, anyhow."

Exasperated, Marcy had the urge to plant the toe of her shoe where it would do the most good. But in a way he was right, she knew. He was on the edge of failure in two subjects. This chance to travel with his father might resolve their differences, and absolve Barry of his doubts and lacking confidence. She said as much.

"Yeah, and believe me I'll work at it. I'm a new person already." Exuberantly, he seized Marcy and spun her around in a waltz without music. "Darn it, Marce, I just wish you were going along instead of old Skinny."

"Don't call her that, Barry. Don't cross her, remember you must get along with Miriam for what—six months?"

"Something like that. And I will manage to get along with her, I vow. It won't be easy, she's touchy as all hell. I'll have to watch my step, she's so damnably sensitive."

Marcy smiled. Here was the pot calling the kettle black,

she thought. She said, "That's a good boy. Do you want to go for a drive tomorrow?"

"Gosh, I'd love to, Marce, except I have to pack, and get rid of a bunch of junk, and a dozen other chores. I'm taking the train Monday. So I guess—" He was suddenly owl-solemn. "I guess this has to be goodbye. Dammit, I hate to think it will be half a year before I see you again. A world apart, me in South America, you in Europe with your aunt and your father."

He put his arms around her, and she raised her face to his kiss, a warm kiss, friendly, not without an edge of passion. He drew her to him so tightly it was painful, held her for only a moment, then released her.

"Marcy, you'll never know how much your friendship has meant to me," he said. "You're the grandest girl I ever hope to meet. You know that I—I love you, Marcy. I hope you find it in your heart to love me."

"Your place in my heart is forever, Barry," she said gently. "I'll miss you, and I'll look forward to the day next autumn when we meet again." She framed his face with her palms and kissed him again, firmly. "That's to remember me by."

"You know I'll never forget you," he said. Turning blindly to the door, he was gone.

CHAPTER XII

Even though it was nearly ten o'clock of another Saturday morning, Marcy was still in slippers, nightgown and robe. She was enjoying a leisurely second cup of coffee, reveling in the freedom of having neither classes nor homework. Without the onus of Barry Olden, things had gone very well the past week. She was a little ashamed of herself to admit Barry had been something of a burden. *He's so unpredictable,* she thought. *Though I love the boy—and that's what he still is—he hangs on me like the Old Man of the Sea.*

Today the spring sun was shining brightly through the scrim curtains of Marcy's small apartment. The trees were in full leaf. In the farmyards the lilacs were gorgeous, and the meadows were jeweled with the gold of dandelions. Doubtless there were Johnny-jump-ups in the damp dells, she decided. This was a day to take the Yellow Peril for a run in the country, Concord, perhaps, or Worcester. She'd call Evelyn; they'd make a day of it, lunch at some inn, pick flowers, visit antique shops.

Marcy enjoyed the friendship of Evelyn Harkins, another of the handful of women students at M.I.T. A handsome, attractive girl from Syracuse, Evelyn had a steel-trap mind, and when the occasion demanded, a tongue like a surgeon's knife. She and Marcy made a good team; together they had won over a number of antagonistic students. And the intelligence of the women, their devotion to their work, had brought many faculty diehards into grudging acceptance.

Putting down her empty coffee cup, Marcy went to the wall telephone and lifted the receiver. Before the operator answered, there came an insistent knock on the door. She hung up, surprised, and opened the door.

Barry Olden stood there, staring at her with eyes red-rimmed and angry. His face was haggard, his suit was rumpled. His four-in-hand necktie was loosened and awry. One cheek was swollen, mottled by a darkening bruise.

"Barry! What on earth—I thought you—oh, come in, come in. You look like the wrath of God. What happened?"

His step was weary as he came in, dropping limply on the horsehair sofa, putting his hat on the end table.

"Let me get you a cup of coffee," Marcy said, and hurried to pour it. "Barry, why are you here? You're leaving on your cruise tomorrow. You must go back to New York."

He held the cup in both hands, and Marcy could see them shaking. He drank deeply of the strong brew. He set the cup down and it rattled on the saucer. He took a deep breath. As Marcy saw him staring at her, she thought he looked like a whipped spaniel.

"Marce, that's all off," he said dully. "The whole thing blew up in one big fight, a family brawl. There's no more cruise, for me there's no home, no father, no nothing. Life's just—just plain no good, Marce."

She sat down beside him. She took his hand in hers, feeling the tension in it. She said, "Tell me all about it. Get it off your chest. Maybe I can help you get things straightened out."

"Nobody can do that," he said harshly. "It was too bitter to ever be patched up. That's why I came to you, the only person who gives a damn about me. I drove all night to get here from New York."

"Drove? At night?" she asked, startled. "But Barry, how—"

"I hooked Father's Oldsmobile. I don't know if he's learned yet that it's missing, nor do I care. Driving alone at night, Marcy, what an eerie experience! Everything pitch black, my headlights boring through it. Racing along dusty roads, now and then roaring through some sleepy village with a few lights in windows. Made a wrong turn once, but got back on the right road. Got here an hour ago, drove around getting up my nerve, then I parked the Olds at the curb out in front."

"Driving all night." She shook her head. "Barry, let's have it, the whole story."

He stared at her with those spaniel eyes. "I told you before that Miriam hates me. She has ever since she hooked my father. Oh, she hides it, always *so* solicitous about my welfare, whether I'm eating right, whether I have enough spending money. But that's only a charade. Behind it she's working to turn my father against me. She's done a good job of that, I tell you."

He lifted his coffee cup. When he continued, his voice was stronger, more angry. "As soon as I came home trouble

started building up, like a black thunderstorm on the horizon. Miriam kept nagging me about quitting college, reminding me that I was losing down the drain the expense of a whole year. I got tired of her nagging at last, and said a few things about her marrying Father for his money, to get away from those bit parts she used to play on the stage. We went at it pretty hot and heavy. You should have seen her, Marce, chain-smoking cigarettes as she paced, her back up like a cat in a corner."

"Your father wasn't there?"

"No, but he came home yesterday afternoon and she unloaded the whole sorry mess on him. He blew up, accused me of being an ungrateful pup, after all Miriam had done for me. I said since the two of them felt that way, the cruise wouldn't be fun for any of us, I knew. I said that Miriam had married him for a meal ticket, and he'd married her because she was good in bed. There were some more hot words, and finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I exploded and blew the lid off the sordid argument."

Marcy sighed and shook her head. "What did you say?"

"I told Father the reason Miriam hated me and ran me down to him was because I had turned her down last summer at the beach when she had tried to—to get me to lie with her. It was true, Marcy, Miriam was like a bitch in heat. She kept after me whenever Father wasn't around. She got me all upset, but I wouldn't do it, even though—Marce, even though I wanted to terribly. But a son couldn't do that to his own father, could he? My real mother had cuckolded him long ago. I couldn't let Miriam put him through that, and with his own son."

"How did your father take it?"

"He yelled that it was a damn lie. I was making it up out of my filthy mind because I hated Miriam. I said—ask her whether I was lying or not, and anyhow there must be other men who hadn't turned her down. He hit me then, Marcy, he hit me and knocked me down. I got up slowly, and saw Miriam standing behind Father, a grin on her face like a cat licking stolen cream, sure that he didn't believe me. But I had started him thinking, and doubt was growing in his eyes. When I saw that, I felt awful. My father would be tortured by doubt; his feeling for Miriam would never be the same. The shame of it came over me like a wave. I grabbed my jacket and stalked out, knowing I was rotten, knowing the reason at last why all the world hates me, ex-

cept you, Marcy. I walked the streets a while, then I went to the garage where the car was kept and got it out. I was so lost, I knew I had to talk to you. So I started driving this way."

"You've done a good job of burning bridges," Marcy said slowly. "Barry, we've got to depend on the help of time's healing touch. Let the two of them go on the cruise. You stay in Boston until school ends, make up your lost classwork. Find a summer job in New York. By autumn your father will have forgiven you. Deep down he loves you, Barry."

"He hates me, and I deserve it," Barry said, unappeased. "I guess your advice is good, Marce, but I've had time to think of other plans. Let's take a drive in the country, a long drive, and I'll tell you about them."

Marcy looked at him, impatient and resentful at having him once more thrust his troubles upon her. The Old Man of the Sea was back.

She sighed and said, "All right, I'll listen. Go downstairs while I get dressed."

The red Oldsmobile tourer looked like a mighty machine to Marcy, used as she was to her little Panhard. Barry handled it well enough, tooling it through Boston traffic, then along suburban streets north and west. On a well-traveled country road he let the big car out. Marcy watched the speedometer surge to thirty-five, then forty miles an hour. She was tempted to protest. However, there was little traffic on this road now, and she was afraid any protest might only make him drive faster.

The roar of the engine and the rattle of gravel against the mudguards made conversation impossible. The wind of their passage was strong, tugging at the scarf Marcy had tied over her red hair, ruffling the duster she wore over her motoring dress. She held tight to the seat arm, and slid down to let the glass windscreen block some of the rush of air.

Barry seemed to have some definite destination. The country looked familiar to Marcy, but it was not until he turned down a side road that she knew he was heading for her own favorite outlook, high on the hill above the valley. He remembered where she'd taken him on that snowy winter day. She felt it would be a good place to talk.

Sure enough, he took the little lane, crossed the creek, and the car began to labor a bit as the slope steepened.

Gears snarled as Barry downshifted rather ineptly. The touring car grumbled its way to the top of the ridge. There Barry stopped, pulled on the emergency brake, and shut off the engine.

They sat for a minute or two without talking. Marcy loved this spot, the meadows lushly green, the woodlots darker, the farmhouses and barns for all the world like a pastoral painting. A few cattle grazed, white and tan, all heads facing in the same direction. Willows traced pale lacery along the little runs. In a far field she could see a farmer and his team plowing, the turned furrows richly black against emerald.

Barry drew off his driving gauntlets, and placed them on the seat beside him, his air purposeful. He looked out over the peaceful scene below for a moment, then he drew a deep breath. He turned toward Marcy. He reached out and caught her hand.

"Marcy, my very dear, I want you to marry me," he said.

This abrupt proposal so startled her that it must have shown in her face, for he drew back a little, staring at her. His tongue tip touched his lips. She saw that his eyes were filled with a desperate pleading.

She was silent for a long time, marshaling her thoughts. *I must not hurt him. He has been hurt enough. Yet I cannot agree to this forlorn plea, it wouldn't work, it has no chance.* Finally she took his hand in both of hers.

"Barry, you're very dear to me," she said. "I'm anxious to help you. But marriage—Barry, that isn't the kind of love I have for you. You're like an adored brother, but not, not ever, a husband. I'm tremendously flattered that you have asked me, but Barry dear, I must—I *must* say no."

"I was afraid that would be your answer," he said in a flat monotone. He pulled his hands free. "Why should you feel any differently from the rest of the world, which detests me? It was just that you were my last hope, Marcy, the final straw I was clutching at. My own mother abandoned me, and Miriam, and father. Now you, the one person I thought I could count on. I guess it's the way the world always treats us poor damned souls. I wish I'd never been born into it."

"Barry, don't talk like that!" she said sharply. "You are good-looking, intelligent, even brilliant. You have a fine and rewarding career ahead of you. You must throw off this attitude, this negative thinking. You know I'll never aban-

don you, Barry, I love you. It's just that I'm not *in* love with you."

He did not seem to hear her. "It's because of what happened New Year's night, isn't it?" he demanded. "You're afraid I couldn't consummate a marriage because I acted like a schoolboy that night. Well, maybe you're right. I was afraid when Miriam offered me that lusting showgirl body of hers. You think I meant that high-sounding idealism that I spat out at my father? That was a lie. I wanted to get between those long smooth legs of Miriam's so badly I ached. But I was scared, Marcy, scared of my father and Miriam and of myself. I'm no good, Marcy. Not to anyone, not to the world. You could save me, Marcy, by saying you'd be with me always. That's all I want."

Marcy put her arm around him and made him look at her. "Barry, I'll always be somewhere near you. You have a place in my secret heart that only you can fill."

He bit his lip, the planes of his face harsh and gaunt, shadowed by a light stubble of beard. He said at last, in a voice quite normal again, "Well, if that's the way it is, it will have to do. I've had my say, you've had yours. We might as well go back to the city." He pulled on his gauntlets.

She watched him set the controls and get out. With an odd air of determination, he pulled the crank, and the warm engine caught immediately. He got behind the wheel and put his hand on the gear lever, not looking at her.

"Brace yourself, Marcy," he said, his voice choked. "We're going on a ride, together. For you are my last hope, and as God is my judge, I will not give you up."

Those strange words puzzled Marcy. She was still pondering them as he put the car in gear and let out the clutch. The big car lurched forward.

She saw that his hands were locked tight on the big steering wheel, but he did not turn the car. She cried out, as instead of backing to turn the car around, he sent it straight ahead, beyond the crest of the hill, through the sparse trees and brush. Horrified, Marcy realized that the abyss of the old quarry lay straight ahead.

"Barry, stop!" she screamed. "The quarry! We'll be killed!"

He laughed wildly. "But we'll be together, Marcy. Together forever! No man will put asunder—"

Holding the wheel with his left hand as the car gathered speed, Barry reached for Marcy with his right hand. His grip on her duster made her pull back. The car struck a half-buried boulder with a crash and a jolt. Cloth ripped, then he had to let her go to use both hands on the wheel. The frail fence that protected the cliff was coming up at them with fearful speed.

The man's crazy! Marcy thought frantically. Then instinct took over. Without conscious thought she seized the hand-rail and hurled herself over the side of the speeding car. Her plummeting body, by the grace of God, slammed into a thick clump of brush. The limber branches gave, cushioning her fall. The breath was almost knocked out of her, but she scrambled free.

Coat torn, scarf ripped away, hands and face scratched and bleeding, Marcy paid no heed but braced herself on the steep slope, looking down.

As long as she lived, she would see again, in nights of bad dreams, the rail fence explode as the heavy car hit it. One timber went pinwheeling through the air as the Oldsmobile went through to the brink of the precipice—and was not. Suddenly the hill was oddly empty.

Marcy raced to the brink as from below came a thump, strangely muted by distance. At the edge Marcy grasped a strong bush and cautiously looked down. The red car lay at the bottom among fallen rocks, crumpled as a child's toy that had been stepped on. Beside it lay a form as lifeless as a doll.

A wave of pity she could hardly bear swept over Marcy. If only . . . no.

Marcy realized that Barry had been caught in the mills of the gods. Nothing she had done or hadn't done would have saved him. The fate of Barry Olden had been sealed that day when his mother had picked up her suitcase and walked out of his life. *How awful,* she thought, *how terribly selfish. I vow, here and now, that I will never, under any circumstances however cruel, abandon a helpless child. Oh, Barry, Barry, my heart bleeds for you.*

She saw people now, running from that nearby house on the valley floor, to the quarry. The numbness of shock lifted, and Marcy straightened her clothing, wiped her face, and started the long way down the shoulder of the hill to do what last little she could for Barry.

CHAPTER XIII

"You must stop dwelling on it, mavourneen," Tom Tarrant said. "Nobody on God's earth could have done more for that lad than you did. It's plain to me that the boy was fey. Now I want you to stop torturing yourself about him. The boy had the mark of doom on his forehead, but it was not put there by you, dear child."

Marcy gave her father a ragged smile of understanding. She was sitting in his suite at the Copley-Plaza, where Tom Tarrant was waiting until his ship sailed for Ireland. He was sailing before Marcy and Dora, for he wanted to spend some time in his boyhood haunts near Londonderry. He was to join his daughter and sister-in-law later, in London.

Through the open window on this warm spring day, Marcy could hear the street sounds, muted and musical. She sighed. "I know you're right, Daddy. Yet I can't absolve myself, there must have been something, anything I might have done to save Barry, but I can't puzzle out what it might have been. God knows I tried to help him, Daddy." She was silent for a moment. "Nor can I forget the sadness of his father's face at the funeral. I think Courtney Olden was closer to his son in death than he ever was in life. I hope Barry knows his father did truly love him."

"Perhaps he does," Tom Tarrant said, gently touching a gnarled hand to his daughter's shoulder. "Mavourneen, you weep for that young man, but your dad finds it hard to forgive him for trying to take your life too." The hand on her shoulder tightened. "Well, that's water under the bridge, thank God."

Marcy managed a smile. "I promise I'll do my best to forget. I'm hoping this trip, the new scenes, the new people, will help me put behind the pain and the horror and the regret."

He stood up stiffly. "That's my redheaded darlin'. Come along now, for I intend to wine you and dine you on the very best ould Boston affords. They tell me the cooks here produce a clam chowder that beats our San Francisco variety."

"I must admit it's excellent," Marcy said. "That's offset by the fact they don't have our sand dabs or abalone." She reached for her bolero jacket. "You're the best tonic any doctor could prescribe for me, Daddy. Suddenly I'm hungry."

In the few remaining days before the *Alearic* sailed, Marcy showed her father the town and the country. She drove him in the Yellow Peril to Lexington and Concord, to Plymouth and Marblehead. They drove through the back-country villages where the residents of the village cemetery outnumbered those left living, towns that were old before Richard Dana sailed around the Horn to write about the barren bay where San Francisco now stood.

"Now just what does this poking and rambling do to your college work, mavourneen?" Tom Tarrant asked.

Marcy laughed. Her father was indeed the tonic she had needed. His plain common sense was curing her of her melancholy over Barry. "Don't worry, Dad. After I returned from —from the burial of Barry, I crawled into a hole and pulled it in after me. Trying to forget the tragedy, I studied until all hours. I worked like a Trojan, I tell you. I caught up what I had missed, and went ahead. The finals were almost all over last week, and I found myself breezing through them. I have only one left, so I'll take that, wait for my grades, and take the train to New York to meet Aunt Dora. So come along, Tom Tarrant, I want to get to Cape Cod by noon. We'll have a grand seafood dinner at Barnstable."

Two days later Marcy stood with her father at the foot of the *Alearic*'s gangplank. He kissed her goodbye and asked, "You're sure you don't want to go with me to Ulster, and fossick around among the bogtrotters?"

"I swear, Daddy, your brogue gets thicker the nearer you get to Ireland," Marcy said laughing. "No, I'd just be trading the rainy spring days of Boston for the cold and rainy spring days of the Emerald Isle. Besides, Aunt Dora wants to shop in New York, before we board our ocean greyhound, as they call the *Lucania*."

"I won't say you're not wise, mavourneen. I may not like the ould homeland meself after all these years. They've had a mort of troubles. Now you and sweet Dora enjoy London. But don't spend all your money with the Sassenach before I join you. Goodbye, darlin', I'll see you in three weeks."

She watched fondly as Tom Tarrant limped up the gangway. Then, without waiting for the *Alearic*'s final warning

whistle, she left the pier toward the lot where she had parked the Panhard. The Tarrants had never been a family for protracted and emotional farewells.

The improvement in Marcy's spirits was heightened when her grades proved excellent, and her instructors were most complimentary. Perhaps this stemmed from it being spring, perhaps the professors were getting used to seeing these trim long-skirted figures in their classrooms. She thought Professor Dietrich of the Physics Department put it best—"I'm gratified, Miss Tarrant, for I was afraid this coeducational experiment was a mistake. I withdraw that, for the way you and Miss Harkins and the other young women have worked, the fine grades you have achieved, and—dammit, your intelligence have shown how reactionary I have been. I'm not sure the world will become as converted as I am, but I hope so. You've brought new life to our staid old institution."

"Thank you, Professor Dietrich," Marcy said, dimpling. "I'll use your name as a reference when I apply for the position of chief engineer of a motor-car company."

Sensing that she was joshing him, he smiled. "In that case I assure you my recommendation will be excellent. Besides, I've watched you dart around in that Panhard of yours, so I can truthfully say 'she has wide experience in the automotive field.'"

Marcy kept her apartment, so the only necessary arrangements were for the Panhard. She left it with John O'Brien at the Shamrock Garage, with permission to use the car as a demonstrator if need be. She entrained for New York with a single suitcase, for she and Dora Laughlin planned to use their few days in New York to acquire complete new traveling wardrobes.

At Grand Central, Dora Laughlin came hurrying down the platform and embraced Marcy. Looking at her aunt, Marcy was delighted. Dora wore a modish traveling dress and a mad little hat. Her cloak was the latest style, and as Marcy hugged her aunt, she caught the aura of expensive French perfume floating around her. Holding Dora off at arm's length, Marcy saw the sparkling eyes, the touch of rouge on cheeks and lip. *She looks perfectly wonderful,* Marcy thought.

She said as much to Dora. "What's the secret, Auntie? Are you in love?"

Laughing, Dora took Marcy's arm as they walked down

the platform to find a redcap. "No, dearie. It's just that I'm so thrilled about this trip. I feel as if I'm crawling out of a dark closet. Why, I'm so devilish I even touched up my complexion a trifle. Does it show? Do I look like a fallen woman? Claribel wouldn't approve of it, I know, but then, Claribel is back in San Francisco."

"You look stunning, dear. And Claribel may stay home. How is Claribel, by the way?"

Dora winked at her niece. "Between the two of us, just as bossy as ever. Here on my own, I feel like a girl out of school. But how about you, honey? You look rather peaked."

"A friend of mine was killed in an accident. It hit me rather hard."

"Oh, yes, that Olden boy. So sad when a young man goes like that. But such things happen, Marcy. Now, what are our plans for the three days before the *Lucania* sails?"

As they followed the redcap with Dora's luggage toward the cab rank, Marcy said, "We have a suite at the Waldorf. From that headquarters, we'll buy out the town. Daddy left me an immense check, with instructions to get myself a complete wardrobe from the skin out. And Auntie, some of the new lingerie!" She winked at her aunt.

"Good, good—this is going to be fun. I have a letter of credit as long as my arm, so we're off! I feel like yelling 'Whoopee!' right here in Grand Central Station."

"Why don't you, Aunt Dora?"

Dora grinned. "Afraid Claribel would hear me, that's why."

For three days Marcy and her attractive aunt had a glorious time. They spent money lavishly, recklessly, with great élan and greater pleasure. Before they were through, they had eight suitcases and two small steamer trunks to go aboard the *Lucania*. They left in their wake smiling sales clerks and indulgent floorwalkers at R. H. Macy's, Altman's, and Simpson, Crawford & Simpson as well as at the small exclusive shops and boutiques.

Their loot included sleek underthings, and slinky silken nightgowns, "for it is likely to be warm in Paris" Dora had said, with a wink. There were new gowns for street wear, of poplin and cravenette and broadcloth. There were light summery dresses of silk and voile and such feathery stuffs. Some of the dresses were of the daring new short length, a good eight inches from the floor. Marcy gasped at the plunging decolletage of some of the long evening gowns—and

bought them. There were hats ranging from the most fanciful, veritable gardens of flowers, to boaters of plain straw, adorned only by a bright ribbon. One of Dora's evening hats was glamorous with a sweep of egret plumes.

As Dora helped Marcy unpack suitcases in her first-class cabin on the *Lucania,* she said, "I think we did quite well, Marceline. We should manage through our month in London."

"I should hope so," Marcy said, laughing. "I hope Daddy doesn't have a stroke when he learns what I've spent." She placed a pair of kid pumps from Cammeyer's in the bottom drawer, alongside a pair of shiny patent boots from Siegel-Cooper. "But it has been loads of fun."

"Fun it was," Dora Laughlin agreed. She put her arm around Marcy's shoulders. "They say it's therapeutic for a woman who has gone through a sad time to go out and buy lots of new clothes. I do believe it's working in your case."

"I think so. But Daddy will think I've taken an overdose of that prescription."

"I doubt if you need to worry about that, dear. The Tarrant Motors building is nearly finished, and Thomas tells me it is almost paid for as well. Your father's credit is almost unlimited." She snorted disdainfully. "Even your Uncle Cham, my dear brother, assured Thomas he could call on Cham's bank for any amount. And you know Cham is reputed to be second only to Norbert Costain for being tightfisted."

"I'm relieved, since it agrees with what Daddy told me in Boston. He's always been pretty frank with me, but I've known him to apply a bit of rose color to some situations. We'll need ample credit in London and Paris, if we take on any lines of European automobiles. And I think we might."

"Your Paris banker isn't Costain *Frères,* I'll wager," Dora said. "Thomas has no use for the Costains or any of their numerous relatives. Some bad business deal in the past, I understand."

"I know about it," Marcy said, adding two more pairs of shoes to the bottom drawer, and closing it. She straightened, and with elaborate casualness, she asked, "Speaking of the Costains, Aunt Dora, what do you hear of Paul?"

"Oh, Paul is quite the beau of San Francisco society," Dora said. "I hear he's doing quite well at the Costain bank. The rest of the time he keeps busy in his role of San Francisco's most eligible bachelor. I've heard he graces every

social occasion, each time with a different girl. He does the polka, the two-step, and the turkey-trot like a professional. It seems to me that every day sees him in the newspaper columns, with speculation on what young lady will finally entice him to the altar. Why, I remember now, you too had a brief romance with Paul, didn't you?"

"Very brief, and almost forgotten," Marcy lied. "He gave me quite a rush after the Nautilus Ball, but it ended there. Our Patsy, though, still has a crush on him, though he claimed that to him she was just the kid next door. I thought she'd got over that, but the last time she came up from Miss Spofford's, and stayed with me, she said Paul was still 'enshrined in my heart.' "

"Pat has always been a bit flighty. I'm afraid she still has a deal of growing up to do," Dora said. "Life will deal her plenty of misery. Yet she's a sunny child, she never seems to have a worry in that pretty head of hers. You knew she is going to go to the Conservatory of Art and Music in Boston this fall? The girl has a definite artistic talent, though not as great, I fear, as Claribel believes."

"Patsy told me about it, the last time I saw her. She needs to develop self-discipline a successful artist must have in addition to talent. I love the little minx, so I'm glad she's returning to Boston, but I don't really know why she can't go to one of the good schools in the Bay area."

"Clara feels they are not as prestigious as the Conservatory. And I think—I really shouldn't say this—Patsy is happiest when she's out from under Claribel's thumb, so she can do just about as she pleases."

"Hasn't she always?" Marcy asked.

Later, when Dora had returned to her own stateroom, Marcy went to the porthole and looked out. A gray drizzle was obscuring the murky waters of the Hudson. The open water between the *Lucania* and a German liner at the next pier was dimpled with raindrops. Altogether a gloomy, depressing day.

She mulled over what Dora had told her about Paul Costain. She was annoyed at herself that remembering Paul should make her breath come quicker, her heart beat a little faster. His complete dismissal of her still hurt her. After those ardent protestations of undying love, to leave her bereft. By the book, she should have nothing but hate for Paul. She should write him off as a cad. But she could not. She could not forget his magnetism, his winning smile, his

dominance, though it had been a year and a half since she had seen or spoken to him.

Her musings were dispelled by the deep-throated whistle of the *Lucania* sending its vibrations through the ship. She heard a steward in the corridor call, "All ashore that's going ashore! All visitors must get off. Sailing in ten minutes. All ashore."

Marcy looked at her chatelaine watch—ten minutes until one. She and Dora had already lunched. Now she thought of dressing warmly and going up on deck to watch the departure, but decided against it. The day was too dull and gray. She had no friends here to bid her *bon voyage.* So she stayed in her comfortable cabin, where from the porthole she could see the tugs as they fussed and bustled around the big ship, chivvying her out into the Hudson.

Now *Lucania* came to life. Shuddering to the thrust of her twin propellors, she swung her ponderous weight of thirteen thousand deadweight tons downriver. Though she had eight years of Cunard Line service behind her, *Lucania* and her sister ship *Campania* held, with their twenty-two-knot speed, the blue riband that marked them the very fastest of the "ocean greyhounds." Marcy had booked their passage on the *Lucania* because Dora Laughlin was the poorest of sailors. The *Lucania* would provide her the shortest time to remain, sick and green, prostrate in her stateroom.

By the time the ship had dropped the pilot off Sandy Hook, she was in the edge of an oncoming storm. The small waves had grown into substantial rollers. When Marcy went to her aunt's stateroom to check, she found her already holding a lace handkerchief to her mouth.

"Oh, dear, I think I must retire," Dora said lugubriously. "Would you ask our cabin stewardess to bring me a pot of tea and a bit of dry toast, about three o'clock? I'll—ugh!—try to keep that much down."

"I'll take care of it," Marcy said. "Now I'll help you get ready for bed."

"That's the best place for me. I heard the purser say we were sailing into something of a storm. Thank you, dear, I hope you aren't subject to *mal de mer* too."

Marcy unhooked Dora's dress and lifted it over her head. "I'm not, Auntie. I took an excursion from San Francisco to Seattle a few years ago, a school trip, remember? It was rough along the coast and some of the kids were ter-

ribly ill. But it didn't bother me for an instant. I was disappointed when we returned by train."

She unlaced her aunt's light corset, and helped her out of camisole and petticoats and drawers. As she slipped a silk nightgown over her aunt's head, she could not help admiring the trimness of her aunt's nude figure. The stomach was flat, the breasts full and firm. She said, "Many a young girl would be proud of a figure like yours, Auntie. It's a shame you hide it under so many petticoats."

"Fiddlesticks!" Dora said, with some spirit. "An old maid like me—but maybe—I'll wait and see what those Paris hussies are wearing. I might turn into a *femme fatale* yet."

"That's the girl," Marcy said, and tucking her aunt into the bed, she stooped and kissed her cheek. She stood for a moment looking down, thinking how nice it would be if Dora could discard some of the spinster ideas Claribel had implanted, and started living. No reason, Marcy thought, Dora couldn't get a man, and any man who got her would be darned lucky. Then it came to Marcy with a little shock that Dora was no little old lady. Though twice Marcy's age, Dora was not yet forty.

She could see Dora was becoming really distressed. She placed a basin on the carpet beside the bed, dimmed the lights, and tiptoed out, closing the door behind her. She found the cabin stewardess, and instructed her about the tea.

"Ah, the poor lidy, Hi'll take good care of 'er," the stewardess said. She was a mine of Cockney solicitude. It was her opinion that *mal de mer* was all in the mind but nothing could be done about it, so there it was.

In her own stateroom, Marcy went to the porthole, sniffed the cool damp air, and closed the glass. In her bathroom she braced herself against the pitching of the ship and looked into the mirror. She *would not* become seasick, she told herself. Not even if they went through the grandfather of all storms. This was her first long voyage, and she was going to enjoy every minute, every hour of it. She was going to eat the food and drink the fine wine. She would meet new people, and dance and flirt, and play whist and shuffleboard and watch for whales. She was *not* going to be seasick and miss one single bit of it.

Small doubts assailed her, but she crushed them.

CHAPTER XIV

As Marcy made her way up the companionway that evening to the dining saloon the seas were growing rougher, and the overcast had wrapped the *Lucania* in early gloom. Only a few diners were scattered through the big room. She found her table, and ordered only a light dinner. She ate it quickly and left. She glanced into the forward lounge but it was empty except for the barman and a few red-jacketed stewards. At the front of the room she stood briefly at the expanse of misted glass, watching the plunge and scend of the ship's bow as it met the white-capped rollers. Tiring of that monotony, finding the turbulent sea vaguely menacing, she yawned, and though the hour was still early, she went down to her stateroom and went to bed. Lulled by the movement of the ship, she dropped quickly to sleep.

She wakened in the gray light of dawn. Seeing no reason to arise, she rolled over and went back to sleep. When she woke again it was seven o'clock by her traveling clock. Throwing back the covers, she went barefoot to the porthole. Opening it, she breathed deep of the crisp salt air, shivering a little in her silk nightgown The sea was still rough, but the overcast had lifted, and a bright sun was slanting across a pale blue sky. In its brilliant light, the seas glinted silver to the wide horizon.

Forgoing her usual regimen of exercises, she showered in the tiny bathroom. She dressed carefully in a fine gray wool. She pinned her flaming hair into a Psyche knot, and touched her cheeks with rouge.

Susan, the stewardess, had just come on duty, and Marcy stopped at the woman's station.

"Hi looked in on 'er, mum," Susan said. "Hi'm afraid she's bin sick. But 'er color's better, and she was sleepin' like a biby, so I let 'er sleep on."

"That's fine, Susan," Marcy said. "Please look in on her a little later. If she's awake, ask if she wants breakfast, though I doubt that. Tell her I'll stop in to see her after a bit."

Going down the passageway, Marcy was feeling what her

father called "the healthy hunger of the Irish peasantry." Going up the companion, she made her way to the dining saloon. She stopped in the doorway, unsure for the moment of her table number. The *Lucania* chose that second to meet a big wave with a heave, a twist and a wriggle. Unprepared, Marcy staggered, reached for support, and found none. The tipping deck seemed to go out from under her, and she was falling.

Two strong arms caught her and held her safe. They steadied her until she regained her equilibrium.

She turned to see the smiling face of a young man—and almost fainted. Paul! Paul Costain! That beautiful face, that curly dark hair, that clipped mustache. What was Paul doing here?

Then he spoke, and the illusion vanished. "*Pardonnez-moi*, ma'amselle, but you have almost fallen. I did not hurt you with my rough embrace?" The voice was lower in pitch than Paul's, more mellow and there was a decided French accent.

"No, no, and I do thank you, monsieur," Marcy said, struggling to regain her composure. "I might have fallen very hard. To whom do I owe my gratitude?"

"Jacques Demaret of Paris, at your service, ma'amselle," he said, and again her heart caught, his smile was so much like Paul's. "It is rough. May I escort you to your table? What is the number?"

"Twenty-two, on the far side," she said, using the rough sea as excuse to take his arm. "And I'm Marceline Tarrant."

"Ah, Miss Tarrant. Charmed. But I am devastate, my table is Number Five." As they crossed the saloon, he brightened. "Perhaps your table is not full, no?"

"I'm not sure," she said as he held a chair and seated her. "Last night for dinner I was the only one."

"I must find out. Don't go away, Miss Tarrant." He was gone.

Very quickly he was back, accompanied by the assistant purser. That young man carried a printed card in a holder. He placed it deftly on the table and snatched away the other card, on which Marcy glimpsed the name *Grover van Steen*. There was a hidden exchange, no doubt financial, between Demaret and the purser, and the young man went away, smiling. Demaret flicked the place card with a fingernail at its place next to Marcy, and sat down. With an air of minor triumph, he picked up the menu, and looking over it at Marcy, nodded at her.

"Now, my pretty American lady, where are you from?" he asked.

"San Francisco," she said. "I am traveling with my aunt to London, and perhaps Paris. Aunt Dora, poor dear, is indisposed."

"Ah, San Francisco, Miss Tarrant—it is Miss, is it not?—a magic city, by all reports, which it has never been my good fortune to visit. But by the time we reach Southampton I hope that you will have told me all about it."

"That's a promise, if you will in turn tell me about Paris," she said.

"I will guarantee it. But tell me, Miss Tarrant, when I embrace you, to save you from disaster, a most pleasant duty, you look at me with such an expression, a look of the mos' peculiar, on your very lovely face. A look of fright, *startlement*. I do not know."

To avoid an immediate answer, Marcy studied the menu. The steward came up and stood obsequiously with pad in hand. For her he put down porridge, eggs Benedict, buttered toast, and coffee.

"For me it will be the same," Demaret told the man. "Except in your kindness leave out that grisly concoction called porridge."

When the man had gone, Demaret looked at Marcy, his eyes sparkling. "Well, who was he?" he asked.

She hesitated. Then it came to her; *what difference did it make? No reason to evade.* Paul's memory was not hallowed. He belonged in the dead past. Time she began all over in the present. She drew a deep breath.

"I was startled, Mr. Demaret, because you resemble so greatly a—a good friend of mine back home."

"And the name of this counterpart of myself?"

"Paul—Paul Costain. Your age, your height, your coloring."

Demaret began laughing heartily. Reaching out, he caught Marcy's hand. "Mlle. Tarrant, this a coincidence. I must laugh. This man I have never met, this Paul Costain of San Francisco, is my second cousin. My mother was a Costain, of the same family of which one branch immigrated to America."

"The family resemblance is most pronounced," Marcy told him. "As we would say, you are Paul's spit and image."

"It would be interesting to meet him, though I have not had the good fortune. It is some more senior member of

Costain *Frères* who takes the long train ride through the buffalos and the Indians to California to do the business with Costain Brothers of San Francisco. I go to New York perhaps twice a year on business, but I am junior."

"I'm sure you'd like your cousin, he's very personable," Marcy said guardedly. "He's unmarried, athletic, very adventurous. He's an executive in the Costain Brothers bank, and doing very well, I hear."

By now the dining saloon was perhaps half full, but Table 22 was in sole possession of Marcy and Jacques Demaret during breakfast. They chatted pleasantly through the excellent meal, both displaying healthy appetites.

When they had finished, Jacques said, "Let us go to the forward lounge and continue this charming talk. We can discuss our cities and our friends and our work. It will be too chilly to lie in deck chairs, and too rough for the promenade."

"Fine, except I must first look in on my Aunt Dora," Marcy said.

Marcy found Dora quite wan, not interested in food or anything else. "The ship's doctor came," Dora muttered. "Gave me some nasty pills. Maybe they helped a little. Run along, child, have a good time. Thank God you're well."

Marcy touched her aunt's cheek and left her to her misery. In the forward lounge, as she approached the table, she marveled again at the resemblance of Jacques Demaret to Paul. As the morning passed in his company, Marcy began to recognize differences in the two cousins. Jacques was more suave, more brittle, more the man of the world. Under his ingenuous manner, Marcy sensed a diamond hardness, an armor against the onslaughts of the world. Yet she guessed that he could show tenderness and consideration. And he had even more of that virile attraction which first had drawn her to Paul. *I started our acquaintance with a misstep,* she thought, *I must avoid another. Or should I? This man might be—well, fun.*

She did not mind that he became her constant companion for the entire day, the first full day at sea. He was expertly attentive, he had a delightful sense of humor. Together they watched the ocean, had croissants and coffee, and lunched. Without probing, she learned that Jacques was twenty-six, unmarried, his father dead for some years. His job was that of a sort of roving ambassador for Costain *Frères,* in which he traveled widely on missions to banking houses in a number of countries.

"Never hardly am I at home in Paris," he told Marcy. "I am what you could call the trouble-shooter. I investigate the credit and the profit possibilities of large loans, for our house or in which we have participation. I decide how many francs Costain's should underwrite, in my opinion. It would be easy for me to—what you say?—miss the boat, but so far I have been lucky. If I were not—" he shrugged, palms extended, "Pouf! One million, two million francs could go down the drain. So Jacques Demaret, maybe he would go down the drain too." Then he laughed "Except the widowed mother of Jacques, Frances Marie Respigny Demaret, she happens to be the younger sister of the aging president of Costain *Frères*. That small fact might help Jacques if he should stub his toe."

"It might be helpful," Marcy said drily. She went to another subject. "Jacques, what do you think of the automobile?"

"What the English call the motor car?" He looked at her, puzzled. "I do not drive one—yet—but to me it has great possibilities. Our house has made several loans, some of considerable size, to manufacturers beginning to build such machines. Why do you ask?"

"My father, who is to join me in London, and I, intend to become the largest dealers in automobiles in California. The main reason we have come to Europe is to look over the English and continental factories, and procure the American agency on the West Coast for one or two of the finest makes."

He looked hard at her, new respect in his eyes. "So—you are a businesswoman? I thought maybe a student, a musician. But a pretty girl like you in the bruising arena of commerce, why—*c'est incroyable*!"

"You men!" Marcy said scornfully. "What would you say if I told you I was well along toward my degree as a graduate engineer?"

He chuckled. "Now, as our British friends would say, you are having me on."

"Not a bit," Marcy said. "I already have a year at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. I know more about motor cars than some of the men you have lent money to, I'll wager. I have a car of my own, and I've driven it over most of New England."

He shook his head, not quite believing. As if putting the subject aside as unprofitable, he said, "We must talk more of this matter another time. But now the wind has gone down, and the waves also. Let us take a turn or two around the deck, to keep the roses in your cheeks."

Marcy went to her stateroom and got a warm wrap, then rejoined Jacques on deck. He looked like a fashionplate in tweed topcoat, and tweed cloth cap with a short bill. She tied a scarf tight over her Titian tresses. Taking his arm, she started with him around the deck. Though the sun was bright, the air was chilly, so only a few of the most hardy passengers occupied deck chairs, or like Jacques and Marcy, joined in the circling of the deck from bow to stern, from port to starboard and back again.

At lunch in the dining saloon, Jacques and Marcy found Table 22 with its full complement of diners this time: a businessman from New York with his wife, a weathered Englishman who was a newspaperman from the *Mail*, two teachers from Ohio on summer vacation, and a buyer from a Chicago department store looking for glass and porcelain, and a very silent, very sad-looking Jewish woman in black, obviously wealthy, for her graceful hands dripped with diamonds.

After a good lunch, they found a table in the lounge, where the horse race game was about to begin. Very seriously, they discussed their wager, and agreeing on Number Five, Jacques went to place their bet. Just as he returned to the table, Marcy felt a hand on her shoulder. "I'd know that flaming torch anywhere," a man's voice said. "Going to Europe to look for that engineering job, Miss Tarrant?"

She turned quickly. For a moment she did not place that smiling face, the curly blond hair, the full yellow mustache—then she said, "Why, Lord Wolverton! How very nice to see you!"

"Denis, if you please, Miss Tarrant. I was afraid you wouldn't remember me, our meeting at Mrs. deFoxe's was so damnably brief."

"How could I forget, when I have your name filed away as a possible employer?" she asked. "Though that will be a few years from now. This trip, Mr. Howerth, combines business and pleasure. My aunt is with me, and my father will join us in London. I'll tell you all about it, but first I want you to meet Jacques Demaret, of the Paris banking firm of Costain *Frères*. Jacques, Denis Howerth."

The two men shook hands. Then Howerth, obviously pleased at seeing Marcy again, said, "You two are alone? Come along. I have some people you should enjoy. Kindred spirits lighten the journey, what? Interesting bunch, talk an arm off you."

Two ringside tables had been joined, and around them sat a diverse group. They seemed to Marcy oddly assorted, as Howerth introduced her and Paul. Yet she could see why they had gravitated together—all under thirty-five, all intelligent, all with that indefinable but unmistakable patina that goes with wealth. Paul Costain and his cousin Jacques shone with that luster, Marcy thought, and all these others wore it, too.

Howerth's casual way with the introductions left Marcy a little bewildered. It was some time before she could assign first name to last, the given name under the nickname, and who belonged with whom. There was Kitti Carnesi, svelte and lovely, a light opera star in London and New York. She seemed quite possessive of Denis Howerth. Marcy nodded to Irene Penland, a rising young British actress, and touched the strong fingers of Sol Mannstein, the brilliant concert violinist. She smiled back at the friendly smile of Jerry Lucchesi, who was with George Westinghouse's electrical firm.

She met Sylvan Crosswhite, and his fourth wife, Gerda. Crosswhite was fresh from the sensational divorce trial that had freed him from Number Three. There was the successful playwright, David Inkman, tall and sardonic. The wealthy Garver Gillespie and his wife Annette seemed to care little for anything except the breeding and racing of thoroughbred horses. And a short, tubby young man with a ruddy face was John Leffler, whose rumpled appearance belied the fact that he was already a crack corporation lawyer.

Jacques, it seemed, already had a nodding acquaintance with several of the group. They all took Jacques and Marcy into their tight circle without question. As Jacques found chairs for Marcy and himself, the Number Five horse came in a winner in the game, and Jacques promptly used his winnings to buy drinks for the entire table.

Gillespie tore up a ticket. He said, "That's twice Number Five has won. He's made of wood, but damned if he doesn't run better than my Bright Angel, a horse that cost me thirty thou. That hayburner hasn't won yet for Annette and me."

"It would be a better gamble to buy the dice that brought Number Five in," John Leffler said. "Six bits might do it."

"Our horses might run better to the throw of dice instead of the whipping of stupid jockeys, eh, Garver?" Annette Gillespie said, rather tartly. Gillespie nodded.

As Marcy took her place between Jacques and Howerth, Kitti Carnesi edged still closer to the Englishman, as if to as-

sert her prior claim. Marcy suppressed a smile, having no desire to preempt the attentions of Lord Wolverton.

Hidden by the table, she felt the hand of Jacques seek hers and press it warmly. She tightened her fingers, and flicked a smile in his direction. The blues that had been haunting her over Paul, over Barry, were beginning to drift away.

CHAPTER XV

On the fourth day out, with the summer sun brilliant and the sea undulating only slightly, Marcy was able to get Dora up into a deck chair. She tucked her carefully into her steamer rug and said, "There, Auntie, the fresh air will do you good. I'm so happy that you're feeling better."

"So am I," Dora Laughlin said. "Child, if you ever want sweet revenge on an enemy, condemn him to an ocean voyage and everlasting seasickness."

"I'll remember that advice," Marcy said, laughing.

"So run along, I'll be all right," Dora said. "I have the latest collection of short stories by Richard Harding Davis, just enough to entertain me without stretching my mind. Are you having a good time, honey?"

"Glorious," Marcy said. "All these witty new friends, so amusing and full of energy. And of course Jacques Demaret—"

"Who looks like a twin brother of Paul Costain," Dora said drily. "I hope you're not getting too involved with him, dear. He is one of the Costain tribe, you know, and you must remember how your father dislikes the Costains."

"Don't worry, Dora dear," Marcy said. "It's only a shipboard romance—but it *is* fun. He's made of Gallic charm. He treats a girl like a fairy princess."

"Lord Wolverton seems like a more solid proposition than your handsome Frenchman," Dora said, with the suggestion of a sniff.

"Denis is one of the nicest men I ever met," Marcy said. "But don't dream of any matchmaking, Auntie. Denis is all wrapped up in Kitti Carnesi, and you'll notice she doesn't let him stray far off the reservation. So I'm afraid I can't aspire to be Lady Wolverton."

"Humph!" Dora snorted. "I'd never consent to that, never. A Laughlin, with six centuries of British oppression of her people searing her soul, could never countenance an alliance with British aristocracy. Of course, your father's an Orangeman, one reason we objected to his marrying your mother.

Though that's all forgiven now, the Laughlins would still find it awful for you to marry an Englishman."

Marcy chuckled and patted her aunt's hand. "There's not even a molehill into which you can make such a mountain, Auntie But would you object to this? Denis has asked you and Daddy and me to spend several days at a house party at Ashdown, their country place. Denis is gathering a group of motor-car buffs with their machines. He calls it a 'regatta on wheels.' Shall I tell him you'll come?"

"Claribel has written to some acquaintances of hers up in the Midlands that I am coming to England," Dora began doubtfully.

"If I know Claribel, they are very stuffy and very dull," Marcy said. "Please give them the go-by, and come with me, Auntie. They say Ashdown is one of the great estates of England, a real showplace."

"I could send the Tennesons a telegram, I suppose," Dora said doubtfully. Then she brightened. "And by the great horn spoon, that's just what I'll do! I've always wanted to see how British nobility lives, and darned if I'll miss the chance by visiting a country vicarage I don't even know. Is that being a snob, Marcy?"

"Not really, Auntie," Marcy said. "Your Tennesons have probably been dreading the visit of 'a strange Ameddican, doncherknow.' When they get your wire no doubt they'll be relieved not to have their routine disturbed. I'll tell Denis that we'll come, then. I'm sure Daddy won't refuse, with all those cars Denis will have at Ashdown."

"Thomas may huff and puff, but he'll come," Dora agreed. "Look, Marcy, here comes your young man. How do you do, Mr. Demaret?"

"Very well, thank you, Miss Laughlin," Jacques said with that brilliant smile. Marcy saw her aunt melt under that insouciant charm just as younger women did. "I see you are regaining the bloom of health. You look charming, even prettier than your niece."

"I'm tol'able, tol'able," Dora said broadly. "But this girl is keeping me from my book. So take her away, will you, Mr. Demaret?"

"It will be a pleasure," Jacques said, bowing to Dora. "We must participate in a grand shuffleboard tourney which is starting on the after deck. Howerth and Kitti say they will defeat all comers, for a side bet of fifty pounds a couple."

"We'll just see about that," Marcy said, taking his arm. "Through fifty pounds is a little rich for my blood."

"We'll badger Denis down to a mere fiver," Jacques said, laughing.

The week afloat fled like quicksilver. Marcy found herself wishing the ship would go slower. With Aunt Dora feeling improved, it did not matter when she and Marcy reached London, since it would be two weeks before Tom Tarrant joined them in any case. Luckily, this was not a record crossing for the *Lucania,* because of the storm delay at the beginning of the trip. It would be at least a day longer than the record the ship had set a few years before, five days and seven hours for the twenty-seven hundred and eighty nautical miles between New York and Queenstown.

She found herself filled with a delightful euphoria, for never in her twenty years had life seemed so bountiful. Her depression was behind her. The self-blame for Barry, the anguish over Paul, were falling into perspective. She recognized now that Paul Costain was another young man on the make, as her father would say; she knew too that she would never forget that first love. She was able to see him with clarity now.

Her lightened mood was due in good part, she knew, to the stimulus of these new companions. As a young girl in the construction camps, she had learned to judge character with some accuracy at least in *most* cases, she corrected herself hurriedly. These new acquaintances were complex people, for the most part, interesting, and by and large, likeable. A few she admired, and only two or three she had learned to dislike heartily. These she avoided, which was not hard, for she was sure the dislike was mutual. Crosswhite was one of these. He was forever trying to hold her hand. In avoiding him, Marcy had the support of Gerda, Wife Number Four, who glared daggers at Marcy every time Garver got out of line. She also dodged the attentions of Jack Leffler, who annoyed Marcy with fulsome compliments and prying questions. She was sure that under the country-boy facade, the lawyer had a steel-trap mind and an icy ruthlessness if anyone stood in his way.

As time passed, Marcy came to realize that beneath the surface of these convivial friendships lay some intense rivalries. Now and then the steel claws showed through the velvet glove. Words bandied in jest often had a cutting edge. Not familiar with all the undercurrents, Marcy sensed that

jealousy and enmity lurked under the endearments. Backed by training, wealth, and intelligence, the *bon mots*, the bickering retorts, were more carelessly sharp than Marcy was used to. She was not sure she liked the game.

To avoid playing she spent much of her time in the company of Jacques Demaret. She was standing far forward in the bow with him, watching the ship's prow spurn the slow rollers in a roil of white spume. Jacques was leaning against the rail when Marcy asked, "Jacques, why are these new friends of ours so arrogant? They speak so cruelly to each other. Oh, I know it's supposed to sound like fun, but it isn't. Underneath it's mean and cutting."

He shrugged. "Their way of life, I suppose. They have so much, but they want more. If they are famous, they want more fame. If they are rich, they want still more wealth. Some day you will learn, sweet Marcy, that human beings are insatiable. You could give the people—how you say it?—the world with a fence around it, and they would demand the moon and the planets. So one must always put the other persons down. If they are big, belittle them, if they have something fine, buy or steal something that will beat theirs. This is a world where cat eats mouse, where lion eats tiger. The law of the jungle is most plain in the halls of the very rich. So to win, dear Marcy, one must be a cat or a lion, and do the eating."

"That philosophy leaves me cold, Jacques," Marcy said. "I'm afraid I'm too chicken-hearted to give gratuitous hurt to anyone, or try to belittle them."

"You'll pay for that attitude, my pretty one, sooner or later. Wait and see. One day you will lower your defenses and someone will storm the breach. In defeat you'll find the cost of trustfulness, and you'll regret the knowledge all the days of your life."

That lesson had come early, Marcy thought, remembering Paul. The world was not sweet, but surely there were unselfish people in it. She took Jacques's arm and turned him away from the bow. She said, "All this philosophy has made me hungry, Jacques. Let's go to the dining saloon. It's about time to eat."

Time fled, and it was the last day out. The weather turned rough again. The overcast sky hovered gray across all horizons. A wet, clammy wind sent its tendrils of chill swirling about the few passengers who braved the deck. The lift and

scend of the waves buffeted the *Lucania*, whereupon Dora Laughlin's sensitive stomach rebelled, and she retired again to her stateroom with her tea and toast.

After she had comforted her aunt, Marcy put on a warm wool coat with a hood and went on deck. To a San Franciscan the cool damp mist was familiar, and she reveled in it. As she turned the bend at the forward lounge, she met Mr. Jorgen, the purser.

"This Irish weather has put roses in your cheeks, Miss Tarrant," he said. "Irish, because tomorrow we'll make landfall at Cape Clear. We'll run down past Barrack Point and steam within shouting distance of the Old Head of Kinsale. I hope we can show you a good view of the coast of the Emerald Isle; it's all a marvelous green at this time of year."

"I hope so, since I'm of Irish descent, you know. Will we have enough time in Queenstown for me to set me little foot on the ould sod of me ancestors?"

"I think so, but not much more," Jorgen said. "We'll just drop mail and express lading and a few passengers. Then we'll be off immediately for Southampton. You're for London, Miss Tarrant?"

"Yes, my first trip. I'm all excited," Marcy said. "And of course I'm looking forward to the captain's dinner tonight."

"It will be great fun," Jorgen promised. "I hope I may have the pleasure of a dance with you."

"I'll save one for you. Let's say 'The Skaters' Waltz.'"

"A lovely tune, and I'm certain they'll play it," the handsome young officer said. "In fact, I'll guarantee it. You see, part of my job is to hire the musicians."

When Jorgen had gone, Marcy found her favorite place in the bow where she could watch the waves and the soaring flight of the sea birds, which had become quite numerous as the ship approached the land. Alone, she had a chance to recall the events of the past week. A ship at sea is a tight little world, and she had met passengers from both first and second class. Jerry Lucchesi, the electrical engineer, had shown her the sleek, intricate machinery of the engine room. He was going to England to check on a new transformer design in which Mr. Westinghouse was interested. And to her surprise, Jerry did not become amused or condescending at her determination to become an engineer. "Why, that's a great idea, Marcy," he said.

She had played shuffleboard as a partner for Denis, Lord Wolverton, since Kitti Carnesi sunburned easily and she had a stage engagement scheduled. Another time, Marcy acquitted herself well in the interminable game of bridge whist, as a partner for David Inman, against Sylvan and Gerda Crosswhite. Marcy suppressed a gasp at the high stakes they played for. She kept her game quite conservative, yet through Inkman's shrewd and calculating play against Crosswhite's wild plunging, Marcy managed to come out with a handsome profit.

She talked of motor cars with Denis Howerth, and the stage and actors with Irene Penland. With Sol Mannstein, the violinist, Marcy had little to say, but that was all right with the young musician, who proved to be a brilliant but nonstop conversationalist.

Most of the time, it was Jacques Demaret who was her companion. The Frenchman seemed to enjoy her company as much as she did his. They talked of many things, of the traditions of France and the United States, of architecture and finance and travel on sea and land. And of course they talked about motor cars. Sometimes the discussion turned to life and love and morals. Marcy was rather amused at Jacques's cynical attitude about so many things staid society considered sacred. She should be shocked, she thought, but she was growing up. Though she didn't always agree, she found his reasoning useful. Jacques was far less callow than Paul was, but of course that had been two years ago.

Now, wrapped against the weather, Jacques found Marcy in her retreat in the bow. "It's our last full day together, at least for the time. You haven't forgotten the captain's dinner tonight?"

"Wouldn't miss it," Marcy said. She looked at him, then away. "You know, Jacques, I hate parting with you. I wonder if I haven't fallen quite in love with you."

His eyebrows arched. "You have? I hoped for that. So may I propose something? You and your aunt are coming to France? Then I want both of you, and your father if he wishes, to spend a week with us at our country estate, Chateau Orient, in "Compiègne." It will give us a chance to investigate this love business. For I confess that a sweetly poisoned arrow has been plunged into my heart."

"Oh, Jacques, you talk so purty!" Marcy drawled, but Jacques failed to grasp her American idiom. He looked

startled. She went on, "I'll say 'yes' for myself and Aunt Dora, though my father may have other commitments. We'll just love to see French countryside."

"I'll feed you *fraises du bois* and *biftek aux truffles*," he said, laughing. "And we'll talk, and talk, and talk some more. There are depths of philosophy we haven't plumbed yet."

"I'll be delighted, and so will Aunt Dora."

"Then that's settled. I wish I could see you in London, but I must report on my New York trip, so I'll stay on board to Cherbourg. When I get home, I'll speak to *Maman*. She'll send an invitation to your hotel in Paris—I have the name—to come to Chateau Orient, with the date. *Maman* is—well, very formal about such matters."

"I understand," Marcy said. "Your mother will be at the chateau?"

He gave her an oddly speculative look. "At least part of your stay. It has not been advertised, but *Maman* has become very important in the affairs of Costain *Frères* since my father's death several years ago. Her brother is president of the firm, but he has suffered a stroke and is not, uh, very competent. *Maman* maintains the old-fashioned notion that it degrades a woman to be active in business, yet she herself is the power behind the Costain throne. She makes the great decisions for Costain *Frères*."

"I see nothing wrong with that," Marcy said.

His lips twisted wryly. "Except custom and tradition. But I can assure you, everyone genuflects before *Maman*, including Jacques. To her I am still the small boy to be ordered around. The day will come, of course—" He stopped without completing his thought. Then he smiled. "Be sure to bring your aunt, Marcy. We have a pleasant surprise for her. My uncle, Robert Duplessis, the Chevalier Moreau, will be there. A single gentleman of middle age, quite handsome, he has an eye for dark-haired ladies of—well, a certain age."

"Aunt Dora will be charmed, I think," Marcy said.

In preparation for the captain's dinner, Marcy had her hair done by Monsieur Plouffe, chief hairdresser of the *Lucania*. He coiffed her flaming tresses in the latest Parisian mode, close to her head in a swirl of little ringlets. This gave her a resilient, sprightly look that was so pleasing that she tipped the man exorbitantly.

She bathed and dusted her body with sweet-scented powder. Her front-laced satin corset accentuated her slim waist and

the curves of hips and breasts. Her camisole, bloomers and petticoat were of light, fine silk. Over them she slipped a clinging gown of water-green silk, with a daringly plunging décolleté, all very simple. Marcy did not care for the beadwork or the overwhelming flowers which were now all the rage, so her striking gown had only a hint of beading around the bosom.

She rang for Susan, the stewardess. When the woman had fastened the myriad concealed hooks and eyes which drew the gown stylishly tight around Marcy's trim figure, she stepped back and said "You look just lahvaley, mum."

When the woman had gone, Marcy touched the perfume to earlobes, throat, and between her breasts. She stepped into the green satin pumps with the jeweled buckles, and pulled on long dress gloves. A last glance in the mirror satisfied her with her appearance, and she was smiling when she answered Jacques's tap on her door.

Jacques was immaculate in ruffled white shirt, white tie, tailcoat and striped trousers. She was pleased that his mouth formed a silent "O" of admiration when he saw her.

"*Mon Dieu*, Marceline Tarrant, but you are a lovely thing, a veritable goddess," he said. "I am humble that you permit an ordinary mortal like me to escort you."

Marcy laughed and took his arm. "Flatterer! There will be fifty girls there tonight prettier than I am. But keep on saying beautiful things like that. I love it."

The captain's dinner was a gala affair. The food was exceptional, the wines excellent. After an iced dessert flambé, the champagne flowed freely. The orchestra was sprightly, and Mr. Jorgen, the purser, had rounded up a full card of entertainment, some definitely amateur, some highly professional.

Kitti Carnesi sang two songs from Gilbert and Sullivan in a marvelous sweet soprano. Irene Penland did a Cockney music-hall piece that had Marcy laughing until she cried. Six of the ship's complement donned women's clothes and did an elephantine rendition of the Floradora Sextette that had even the imperturbable Jacques Demaret rocking with laughter. Then Gerda Crosswhite, in flowing chiffon, did a classical dance to a Debussy nocturne. It was rather esoteric, Marcy thought, for this particular occasion.

After Mrs. Crosswhite swooped to her exit at last, the pink-cheeked assistant purser gave a long reading in Yorkshire dialect. It must have been humorous, for many laughed,

but Marcy found it completely incomprehensible. The entertainment wound to a close with the entire company and audience singing "Auld Lang Syne."

Marcy said, "Come, Jacques, they're playing a two-step. Let's dance."

Out on the floor, Marcy found to her surprise that Jacques was an indifferent dancer. So she let him retire to their table after dancing with her. He sat contentedly sipping wine, watching Marcy waltz and two-step and polka with a succession of eager partners.

One of these was Mr. Jorgen, the purser, and true to his promise, the orchestra played the "Skaters' Waltz."

After a strenuous one-step with John Leffler, Marcy dropped into a chair beside Jacques. "It's odd how a stout man like our lawyer friend can be so light on his feet," Marcy said. "And he's tireless." She wiped her perspiring forehead with her handkerchief, then took a sip of champagne from her glass, made a face, and put it down. It had grown warm and flat.

She shook her head when Jacques asked if she wanted more. He took a hunting-case watch from his fob pocket, and rather ostentatiously snapped the platinum case open. "Marcy, though it is only midnight, I find I am weary. Perhaps you would like to stay. Or may I escort you to your stateroom now?"

"The latter, Jacques. I too am running out of steam," she agreed. She gathered purse and lace shawl and gloves. "We'll call it a day, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Their departure was hardly noticed, for others were leaving. As the two descended the companionway, Marcy smiled; Jacques was a trifle unsteady. She tucked her hand beneath his arm as they went along the lower passage.

He stopped, turning her to face him. "Marcy, dearest girl, for such a beautiful evening to end so dull seems improper. In my stateroom I have a bottle of brandy, the noblest product of Monsieur Hennessey. Come with me and have a—what do you call it?—nightcap before we part."

Marcy looked at him, frowning. *The man is so handsome,* she thought, *so virile—and so transparent!* She could feel the animal power he exuded, and there was no doubt about what he wanted. And suddenly, she wanted it too. She knew she wasn't in love with that beautiful he, though she'd grown fond of him. But what had love to do with the way she felt? This was more elemental than love. It was a wanting,

a hot desire for Jacques Demaret. And by Eros and Aphrodite, she swore, she wanted him now. And she'd have him.

"Lead the way, M'sieu Jacques," she said. "It has come to me that a nightcap is exactly what I've been longing for."

CHAPTER XVI

Jacques's stateroom was twice the size of Marcy's, grandly appointed, as befitted a director of one of the great Parisian banking houses. There was a basket of fruit and there were roses, both from the management of Cunard, Marcy guessed. She leaned down to feel the soft touch of the petals on her cheek, and to smell the fresh perfume of the flowers. They'd been preserved on ice for this moment, no doubt, she thought, as without turning she heard him lock the bolt on the cabin door.

She dropped shawl, gloves and purse on the sideboard as he took off his tail coat and hung it in the closet. He opened the sideboard and took out a decanter and poured golden brandy into balloon glasses. He handed her one, bowed, and touched his own glass to hers. He said, with only the slightest slurring of his words, "To us, my Lorelei of the Titian hair."

She smiled at him and sipped. She did not move as Jacques removed his dress tie, and took off his black pearl studs and cufflinks. Amused, she thought what prosaic preliminaries people go through to arrive at their destination.

He came to her, then. She leaned back against the sideboard, not avoiding his embrace. He buried his face against her neck and said, in a tone of passion, "Marcy, I must—"

"No need for talk, Jacques," she said softly. His lips came upon hers, first gently, then harshly, seeking, seeking. The warmth of his lips sent desire surging through her body. She felt the pressure of his eager body against her, and smelled the man smell of him, cologne, and tobacco and wine, the smallest hint of perspiration, a virile aroma, not unpleasant.

She broke away and said, "Jacques, a thousand hooks and eyes fasten this gown. You'll have to help undo them."

Again she felt a twinge of amusement as his eager fingers trembled and fumbled to unhook the stubborn fastenings. She said, "That's enough," and stepped out of the gown,

draping it carefully over the back of a chair. She felt his eyes upon her as in frilly petticoats, and corset and camisole, her shoulders bare, her long legs erotically pleasing in sheer silk stockings, she stood before him, knowing that urgency was burgeoning in him.

She turned away and worked on the tight lacing of her satin corset, hearing behind her the rustle of cloth, the thump of discarded shoes. The corset fell away, revealing trim breasts, growing taut with desire. She stripped off the silken clinging of the rest of her lingerie. Taking a deep breath, she turned toward him, naked except for her black silk stockings.

He stripped off his underdrawers, and naked, he embraced her, pressing hard, his hand on her buttocks drawing her tight against him. They kissed, then, wordlessly, they moved to the bed. Marcy felt the edge of it against the back of her knees, and let herself collapse backward on the softness. Her strong young arms pulled Jacques down onto her eager body, and her legs widened in welcome.

It could have been minutes later, or an hour, when Marcy sat up in the bed. Jacques lay naked beside her, his eyes closed, a half-smile on his face. He seemed asleep, but as Marcy swung her stockinged feet over the edge of the bed, one hand reached out and caught her, the other sought the roundness of her thigh.

Firmly she disengaged his grasp. "Sorry, Jacques, twice will have to be enough," she said softly. "Though it was simply heavenly, I must go. Otherwise I'll become the scandal of the *Lucania*."

"Damn all scandal!" he exclaimed, and his hand slid from her thigh to her breast. "Please, Marcy, I can manage, one more time if you can. It was so good—"

"To me too, dear Jacques," she said, kissing him. Dimly she heard the echo of another time, another bedroom. "But all good things must come to an end." It was not easy, but she pulled away from him, and began picking up her underthings. She found herself blushing at standing naked before a near-stranger, feeling his eyes hot upon her. She had been perfectly shameless before, but after she felt self-conscious.

She felt the same embarrassment when she came from the bathroom in her underthings. Jacques had slipped into a dressing gown, and she wondered if men were as conditioned to concealing their nakedness as women were.

She dropped her gown over her head, and turned her

back to Jacques. "Hook me up, Jacques," she said "But only half a dozen or so, in strategic places. That will be enough to get me to my cabin."

He obeyed, and when he was finished he gathered her to him and kissed her ardently. When the passion of their kiss was broken at last, he held her off at arms' length, admiring her. "Dear Marcy, you and this night are to remember. You must—you *must* come to France. We will have other nights."

" 'Man proposes, God disposes,' " she quoted. "Yet I'll try. Tonight you have become a very special man."

She picked up her belongings, and waited for him to unlock the stateroom door. He opened it narrowly, scanning the hall. "Empty," he said, and opened the door wide. He held her hand lingeringly. "You're sure you must go?"

"Very sure," she said positively. She touched lips briefly to his cheek, and hurried away down the passage. Behind she heard his door close, and the lock click.

In her stateroom, she undressed again and made her nightly ablutions. She slid the cool silken nightgown over her head, tumbled into bed, punched the pillow to her liking, and was ready for sleep. But it did not come.

Marcy welcomed this mild insomnia. She could not resist running through her analytical mind the events of the night. She had enjoyed the captain's party; it was always pleasing to know one is popular. As for the end of the evening, Marcy was sure Jacques had planned that denouement in his stateroom all day, perhaps even before that. She chuckled. He would never know that she had made the moves the script called for, the right moves at the right time, not because of his overpowering charm, but because she had the identical physical objective. She would always let him believe that he had been the irresistible seducer.

This sexual interlude had left Marcy with no regrets. It had, though, proven to her that she did not love Jacques in the breathtaking way she had loved Paul. Jacques had proven expert in bed. She still glowed with the memory of the way he had schooled her eager body to depths of satisfaction she had never imagined. But love? She had sensed a reserve in Jacques, just as there was a secret inwardness in herself that he had not touched, nor would she ever let him find it.

Since her father had told Marcy that it rains somewhere in Ireland every day of the world, Marcy was not surprised

when it was raining in Queenstown. She and Jacques, clad in waterproofs that glistened with gentle drops that oozed from the gray sky, came down the gangplank to the brick-paved quay. Marcy's skirt was a daring nine inches above the ground, a length recently made acceptable for bad weather even in the most moralistic circles. Its shortness saved skirt and petticoat hems from becoming nastily wet and dirty. The fashion pleased Marcy, for she knew her trim ankles looked beautiful in sheer black silk.

There was little the two could see in Queenstown in the brief time at their disposal. In the steady drizzle, the waterfront was dingy and unkempt. Marcy and Jacques walked a short way to the main part of town, and managed to find a warm tearoom, where Jacques bought tea and crumpets. They talked of inconsequential matters as if by agreement.

They were almost finished eating when the steam whistle of the *Lucania* growled deep in its throat. Hurriedly Marcy gulped the last of her tea; laughing, the two hurried back to the quay and ran up the gangplank.

Marcy leaned on the ship's rail in the soft rain, watching the hubbub of departure. She said, "Jacques, today I have fulfilled one of my ambitions. I have set foot on the soil of Ireland, the motherland of Tarrant and Laughlin."

"And a very muddy soil that was," Jacques said. "I see why this Emerald Isle is so lush and green. The rain never stops falling on it. With that in mind, let us go into the lounge before we wash away."

Very late that night, in the flurry of disembarking at Southampton, Marcy said her final goodbyes to Jacques. He was continuing on to Cherbourg, where he would catch the boat train to Paris.

"I am devastate, Marcy, that we must part," he said sadly, holding her hand. "If I had not important business for Costain *Frères*, I would consign all else *à l'enfer*, and take a train with you to London. But I dare not. If I did, *Maman* would cut my heart out and make me eat it. So now I must say *au 'voir*."

"Ah, Jacques, you French are so prone to exaggeration," Marcy said, laughing. "You know your *Maman* dotes on you. I'll wager that in her sight Jacques can do no wrong."

He shook his head. "In life, at Chateau Orient, in society, perhaps you are right about *Maman*. But in business—" He

pursed his lips and shrugged. "In business *Maman* can be a tigress, I tell you. To cross her—no, not Jacques."

Marcy's last impression of Jacques Demaret was his forlorn expression as he handed her and her aunt into a cab at dockside for the journey to the railroad station. After the cab driver piled their luggage in front and in back and around them, he popped his whip over his swaybacked horse and Marcy fluttered her handkerchief out the window at Jacques, who stood there, hand raised in salute, until the hansom turned the corner.

Though later on occasion Marcy thought fondly of Jacques, her shipboard romance with him faded into memories as she and Dora Laughlin lost themselves in the excitement of exploring London. Every city has its own personality, and Marcy absorbed with delight the essence of that old beldame, London. She loved its glamour and its squalor, the magnificence of ancient tradition. Looking at the sooty, ivy-covered walls, the gloom of tombs and the sweeping buttresses of Westminster Abbey, the glorious vault of St. Paul's, Marcy caught herself paraphrasing an old poem she had once read: "city half as old as time."

It did not take Dora long to recover from the enervation of seasickness. When she did, she proved to be a delightful traveling companion, young in spirit, ready for any adventure. They shopped on Regent Street and Bond Street, and all the great stores and the small boutiques were pleased to take those American dollars. They went to plays, Shaw's *Candida*, then a marvelous presentation of *Yeomen of the Guard*. They laughed at the antics of music-hall comedians, and were thrilled by the great voices singing Verdi's "La Forza del Destino" at Covent Garden.

One glorious summer day they went by carryall to that most beautiful of all English royal palaces, Hampton Court. Another day, Marcy hired a handsome de Dietrich touring car for the trip to Windsor. Marcy was tempted to ask to do the driving herself, but did not care to argue the stubborn British resistance. The hired chauffeur did prove quite skilful and knowledgeable. The de Dietrich was less satisfactory, for though it was one of the most expensive of motor cars, it was hard to start and otherwise temperamental.

They enjoyed the intimate countryside and the great pile of masonry that is Windsor was grandeur in its park of green lawn and field. Queen Victoria had died in January,

and the long period of mourning for her was still stringent throughout England. But by great good luck, the new King Edward was not in residence at Windsor, so Marcy and her aunt were able to go on a conducted tour of the tremendous royal art collection. It was a thrill for Marcy to see these great masterpieces, long familiar in reproduction. Dora enjoyed everything until they went through the gloomy St. George's Chapel, so rich in history, with its magnificent stained glass windows.

"Humph!" Dora said scornfully. "Another of the things stolen by Henry the Eighth from us Catholics!"

Tom Tarrant joined Marcy and his sister-in-law in London. He had a cold in the head, and was unable to throw off the depression his old homeland had stirred in him.

"It's so cold and damp," he told Marcy. "And I'd forgotten the smoke and the stink of peat fires. They're so poor, mavourneen, so backward. And the poverty in the slums of Belfast and Derry you wouldn't believe. It made me heartsick. In the country, the little acres of poor land on which families try to make a living, and where they go hungry nine months of the year. And the rotten hovels in the cities, little more than shacks. The people work for starvation wages, when they can find work at all."

He sighed and sat silent for a long time. He shook his head and went on. "But those terrible conditions can be endured. But what can't be, what struck me, long accustomed to the freedom of America, was the hopelessness of the people, little more than slaves. And the hate, Orangemen hating Catholics, Catholics hating Orangemen, the people of one district hating those who lived elsewhere, all of them narrow and bigoted. The violence is awful, the drunkenness is monumental, and the hopelessness beyond help. But most of all the hate. You can see it, Marcy, in the faces and the eyes and the hearts of farm lad and city boy alike. Never will I go back to that purgatory again, mavourneen, never again. I will send what I can to charity, nor does it matter what the faith of the mouth it feeds. But I will not go back. It can't endure, Marcy. One day, and that soon, hell will break loose in Ireland. Men will die, and women, and children too, and fires set by desperate men will light the sky from Bantry Bay to Lough Foyle. It's a terrible thing, daughter, a terrible thing, and it's gone beyond all saving."

Marcy, sitting on the arm of his chair, patted his shoulder. "Do what you can for them, Daddy, though it sounds

as if the situation is beyond the help of mortal man. It must have worsened since you were a boy."

He shook his head. "Perhaps. But maybe I was used to it, maybe I didn't know any better. I had a friend, too, a Catholic, though our friendship was frowned upon. Therefore we slid off one night and ran away to sea. Poor Michael was swept off the deck in a storm off the Horn, and I've never in all these years stopped missing him. For he and I bolstered each other's courage and brought us out of that hopeless hell that was and is Ireland."

He shook himself as a wet dog does, as if to shake off the sadness of all he had seen. "Forgive me, mavourneen, but as you know an Irishmen is God's strangest creature, who glories in battle, even if it is with his own brother, and is happiest when he is sad. We forever fly in the face of common sense, and we go our contrary way against all the world, God help us."

"Those traits are what make us great, Daddy," Marcy said staunchly.

The invitation from Lord Wolverton arrived at their hotel. Blessed again by sunny weather, the Tarrants and Aunt Dora took the train for Luton, that Bedfordshire place long famous for hats. Luton was growing famous as well for machinery manufacture, having several smaller factories besides the great Luton Machine Works. Ashdown, the Wolverton estate, was in the lovely Chiltern Hills a few miles from Luton, looking down on the lush valley of the River Lea.

A shining Mercedes landaulet met them at the station, and the chauffeur and footman, smart in uniform, loaded their luggage into the tonneau. The big car tooled through the cobbled streets of Luton into the country. The chauffeur, his back ramrod straight, kept a firm grip on the wheel, while the footman, just as straight, sat beside him with arms folded. The three visitors were comfortable in the rear seat behind a glass windscreen.

"Nice enough machine," Tom Tarrant said to Marcy in a low voice. "But she seems heavy. Bet she's hard on tires."

The chauffeur rolled the Mercedes at a spanking pace along the gravel road between the hedgerows, a plume of dust spinning high into the quiet air behind the car. The car turned in at a wrought-iron gate in a high wall of red brick. The gateman waved them through, and the car continued on along a tree-lined lane past formal gardens to the great house. In spite of its size, it was in good proportion,

mostly of graceful Georgian architecture. To Marcy, in the setting of clipped green lawns and flower beds riotous with bloom, Ashdown conformed exactly to her vision of what a great English country house should be.

To reach the main entrance, they passed several other automobiles parked along the driveway. Marcy recognized a Winton, a Fiat, and a graceful machine which must be a Napier. Another was one she had never seen before, cream and buff of body, gleaming with brass.

As the butler opened the door, Denis Howerth met them. "Welcome to Ashdown," he said, taking both Marcy's hands in his. Then he released her and shook hands with Tom Tarrant. "So nice you could come, Mr. Tarrant. Marcy says you are entering the business of motor cars. Well, I can promise you some fine ones of all shapes and sizes. For the next few days you will be deafened by the roar of engines and choked by castor fumes."

"A regatta on wheels, my daughter tells me," Tom Tarrant said. "I sure appreciate a chance to look at some of the makes and models."

Marcy and Dora were established in one comfortable suite by Lady Wolverton and two pert English maids. Denis' mother was a handsome, gracious woman with gray hair and a pleasant, friendly manner.

"So happy to have you," she told Marcy and her aunt. "If there is anything you need, don't hesitate to ring. Dinner will be at seven."

Marcy dressed with care in a gray moiré silk, rich-looking but not ostentatious. She fastened her sapphire pendant around her neck, and going down the hall, tapped on the door of her father's room.

She found Tom Tarrant as she knew she would, struggling with his white dress tie. His face was pink, his manner exasperated. "These English and their formal dress!" he fumed. "God knows I'd be happier in flannel shirt and a pair of Levi Strauss pants. And dress ties—the omadhoun who invented them should be hanged and quartered."

Laughing, Marcy deftly tied the tie and settled it into place. She helped him into what he called his "clawhammer coat," checked links and studs and the set of his trousers. "You'll do, daddy," she pronounced. "Come along, now. I'm sure Lady Wolverton will seat you next to some beautiful young woman who will speak sweet nothings in your ear."

"It would be more to my liking to sit next to some

young man with grease under his nails who'd talk gear ratios and pneumatic tires," Tom Tarrant grumbled.

Lady Wolverton presided in the long dining room with its oil portraits of Howerth ancestors along the walls. She was striking in black satin, not made fussy by beads and sequins. She wore a single diamond ring and a magnificent rope of pearls as her only jewelery.

"How lovely you American ladies look," she said. "I'm fond of Americans, they are always frank and refreshing. Mr. Tarrant, I have seated you between our pretty cousin, Betty Harrow, and John Dryer, assistant manager of our Luton Works. Since all our motoring guests have not yet arrived, we'll be only twelve at dinner."

Marcy found herself between Denis Howerth and his Uncle Horace, who was senior partner and chairman of the board of Luton Machine Works, Ltd. Horace was a pleasant old gentleman of impeccable manners, but quite deaf. After a few attempts at conversation with raised voices, Marcy was pleased when Horace turned to his wife at his far side, and left Marcy free to talk with Denis.

"It's going to be a great week," Denis said, enthusiasm in his voice. "Marcy, I'm completely sold on the future of these machines. We've hardly scratched the surface. My new Mercedes, now, what did you think of her?"

Marcy had learned early and to her chagrin that there is no fiercer loyalty than that of a man toward his own motor car. There were three things she would never argue about with a man, his politics, his religion, or the make of car he drove. So she said cautiously, "It's a beautiful machine, and powerful. The only comment my father and I made about it was—well, that it seemed a trifle heavy."

He turned toward her, his face animated. On his fork was a piece of beef roast he had speared. He waved the fork above his plate in his enthusiasm. "Why, you've put your finger on the problem exactly! Marcy, demmed if I don't put you on my payroll. The Mercedes *is* too heavy; you should hear some of our little country bridges creak when she goes over. Automobile makers must begin using lighter materials; just increasing power is not enough." He popped the meat into his mouth, chewed, and took a sip of the excellent Bordeaux. "Power–weight ratio, that's the thing. Must improve it, you see."

"You plan to jump in with both feet, into the motor car business?" she asked Denis.

He shook his head. "Just with one. I'd rather like to build my own cars, but Uncle Horace contends, and he's convinced me, that it will be more profitable and less risky to make the components and accessories for the cars that other firms make."

"Quite logical, I think," Marcy said. "There will be a high mortality among manufacturers before the best ones rise to popular favor. But all of them, large and small, will need axles and transmissions, springs and radiators."

"Exactly what Uncle Horace says. I've got a young man coming tomorrow you'll enjoy talking with, you speak the same language he does. Charles Rolls."

"The auto racer? I must meet him. My Panhard is a smaller model of the car he's won so many races in."

"You drive?" Denis asked, startled.

"Of course. I've never raced my Panhard, but I have clocked once at forty-two miles an hour on a straight stretch of road. It was glorious, just like flying."

"But—but isn't that dangerous?" he asked.

Marcy sighed. "Why more dangerous for a woman than a man? We have as quick reflexes, as good judgment, and we're quite as daring."

"Why, that must be right," he said slowly. "Marcy, forgive me; I just never thought of woman drivers. I suppose, since I'm just learning to drive myself, my male ego came to the fore."

"You're forgiven," she said, laughing. "Maybe you'll let me take the Mercedes for a spin and show you."

"Tomorrow is mostly free. I'll take you up on it."

"Good," Marcy said. She changed the subject. "Who else will we have, Denis? What of the lovely Kitti Carnesi?"

"She'll be here tomorrow. She's coming with a cousin of hers, a Count Carlo Ferroni, Italian, y'know. Chap has begun building cars, and he's bringing one to show us. Kitti says it is wonderful so I'm anxious to see it."

"And Charles Stewart Rolls, of course, and Mr. Jernigan." She nodded at the portly man across the table.

"Yes, Jernigan's a wealthy mill-owner from the Midlands. Widower. Owns that handsome buff machine on the drive, a Spyker, made in Holland. Peculiar car, drives on all four wheels."

"And the Powyses?"

Denis looked down the long table at the dignified Britisher and his vivacious wife. "Yes, Sir Henry and Ethelda. Quite

well-to-do, owns a big forging plant over Birmingham way, engine wheels, machine parts and so on. Swears by that American Winton of his, you saw it outside. The Fiat belongs to Uncle Charles, he likes it, though Millicent wants to change to a Daimler. Let's see—oh, yes, Douglas Waverley and his wife Norah are coming. He's an M.P., much interested in legislation to improve the lot of the automobile owner. Up to now horse owners and country people have looked on our machines as inventions of the devil. Waverley is gradually changing that."

"It sounds most exciting, Denis. Thanks for asking us. Like your Mr. Waverley, I think we've got to get motor cars out of the category of rich men's toys. Though I suppose the wealthy buffs, like this Count Ferroni, do help the cause."

"Now, now, Marcy, you've got Carlo Ferroni all wrong," Denis protested. "Kitti has told me about him. His title is one of those Italian honorifics that is ancient enough, but what remains of the Ferroni estate is run down, almost worthless. He's as poor as a church mouse. This trip is a rather desperate effort to raise funds to build his cars."

"Does he have some new ideas?"

"Kitti says he does. Sadly, I'm afraid the young man is doomed to disappointment. At Luton Machine we deal with jackleg inventors almost every week, and they seldom have anything worth following. Still, we'll take a look at his machine. Give him the benefit of the doubt, doncherknow."

After dinner the men remained in the dining room for brandy, port, and cigars; the ladies repaired to the drawing room for small talk. It was a tedious interlude for Marcy, whose appetite was whetted for talk of motor cars, but she set herself to her feminine duty and made a pretty good job of it, in her own opinion. It was with much relief that she heard male voices approaching, and she had a fascinating chat with the Member of Parliament about car lamps.

CHAPTER XVII

Marcy was wakened the next morning by the pop-pop, putt-putt of automobile engines, rising now and again to a snarling crescendo. Sleepily she glanced at her traveling clock and saw that the hour was not yet seven. *I can't miss this activity*, she thought, and jumped from bed. She bathed hurriedly, and dressed in cotton shirtwaist and blue broadcloth skirt of scandalous brevity. From harsh experience, she had learned the messiness, even the danger, of any clumsy attire around an automobile.

Downstairs, she was served from the buffet with bacon and eggs and hot rolls, and coffee, refusing kippers. She was almost through eating when Dora Laughlin came down the stairs and took a plate.

"My goodness, Marcy, what a devilish racket so early in the morning," Dora said, as the maid filled her plate. "I think I'll try those kippers."

"It's never too early for a motor car buff," Marcy said. "And if you don't mind, Auntie, I'm going out to join them."

Her aunt sifted salt and pepper on her eggs. "Go along wid ye! While you're getting all dirty, I'll be with Lady Wolverton on a tour of the house. That I wouldn't miss."

Marcy stopped beside the handsome buff and white Spyker touring car. Marcy was interested in its four-wheel drive. She saw that the chauffeur had the bonnet up and was tinkering with the engine. He showed astonishment when Marcy leaned over his shoulder, and was even more surprised when she suggested that cleaning the wire screen on the carburetor might help. Rather skeptically, he rinsed the screen with gasoline and replaced it. When he cranked it, the Spyker's engine settled into a contented purr on all six cylinders.

With an expression of awe, the chauffeur said, "Thankee, mum. I've learned how to put this machine over the road all right, but I ain't much on the innards of the beast. Ain't like the hosses I used to drive. If I may be so bold, how did a young lady learn about engines?"

"You can thank John O'Brien of Boston, Mass., U.S.A., for

letting me hang around his Shamrock Garage and watch the mechanics," she said, and went on to the black and gold Mercedes of Lord Wolverton.

"Want to go for a spin?" Denis asked. "Justin is just filling the radiator, and we'll be ready."

"If I can chauffeur you," Marcy said.

He looked at her doubtfully. "All right, if you're sure you can handle her."

"Just hop in," she said, and climbed into the driver's seat.

Justin, the chauffeur, looked somewhat annoyed as he replaced the radiator cap. But he stooped to crank dutifully as Denis told him. Marcy studied the controls a moment, then set spark and gas levers, and made sure the gears were in neutral. She signaled, and Justin pulled up on the crank. The man seemed surprised when the Mercedes started and burbled contentedly.

Marcy drew a light scarf over her red hair and tied it under her chin. She put the car in first gear, let off the brake, and slowly lifted her foot on the clutch pedal. The Mercedes rolled out with satin smoothness, and she fed it gas. She tooled it around the curve of the driveway, through the main gate, and as she turned into the Luton road, she increased speed.

"She handles nicely," she said to Denis over the rumble of the engine and the spatter of gravel against the mudguards. "But she's heavy for her horsepower, she is slow in acceleration."

Denis settled his goggles more firmly, and pulled down the bill of his motoring cap. "There's a good hill next right," he said. "It makes a good trial run."

As the slope steepened, the Mercedes began to labor. Marcy downshifted, double-clutching as John O'Brien had taught her. The car held steady, until a stiffer slope made Marcy downshift again. But she still had her lowest gear to go when the big car topped the hill. She pulled to the side of the road, braked to a stop, and took the car out of gear. She turned to find Denis looking at her in admiration.

"Admirable, Marcy," he said. "Last time out Justin stalled her, and we've never reached this spot with a gear left."

"You have to baby them, as you do a horse, even though they're steel and brass," Marcy said. "I think if I teach Justin double-clutching he'll be able to do the climb as easily as I did." Secretly she was quite pleased with herself for handling a strange car so skillfully.

Looking out over the valley of the Lea, she said, "What

a perfectly lovely view." Then, with an impact that was almost physical, memory came to her. Another scene, high on a New England hill, two people looking out over a green valley—and then—The thought was so poignant she had to bow her head, biting her lower lip.

Denis was talking, and she thrust into the back of her mind that sad memory of Barry, and listened. He was pointing out the salient points of the area, the ancient church, the boundaries of Ashdown. In one of England's innumerable wars, he said, an army had been stopped from crossing the Lea near here by a handful of dedicated countrymen. He directed Marcy's attention to the north of the town, where the plant of the Luton Machine Works, marked by six tall smokestacks from which a blue-gray haze spread across the valley.

"When those stacks are smoking, they mark prosperity for the whole shire," he said with some pride. "As the biggest employer, we try to keep our people working the year 'round. But if we don't get the orders, we have to lay many of them off. Which is a sad time for everyone. That's one reason I want to go into this business of auto components. I believe it will keep our employment steadier, our people prosperous."

"You seem to do a good many things to keep your working force happy. I've noticed that," Marcy said.

"I do, much to the dismay and criticism of many of our industrial leaders. Luton Machine pays the highest wages in the area, and works the shortest hours. We've reduced our accident rate by safety measures, we've made our shops quieter, we use fans to exhaust smoke and fumes. Luton's provides medical care for employees and families. We have decent, low-cost housing for many of them. We have a long record of good relations with the craft unions, and now we are about to recognize the union of unskilled workers. So you can see, Marcy why we are often at odds with the management of other firms."

"But it pays off," Marcy said.

"It pays off," Denis said. "We have the finest staff, the most loyal workmen in all of England. Moreover, we have a production rate per man-day that is the envy of most industrialists, although the damned fools won't spend the money we do to attain it. I'm proud of our relations with our people, Marcy, damnably proud. They are good people, they're proud, they're the backbone of old England. There's a new day coming." He was silent.

"In America too, Denis. And the motor car is going to be one of the movers and shakers of the old way of life."

"You're ready to gamble on it?"

"Yes. The Tarrants plan to shove all their chips to the center of the table."

He looked at her blankly. Then he smiled. "Oh, yes, a term from the game of poker, eh? You think it's time to move?"

"Definitely. As Daddy and I see it, the ones with the nerve to get in on the ground floor—the first story—will have an edge over all the Johnny-come-latelys." She glanced at the chatelaine watch pinned at the front of her jacket. "I say, Denis, hadn't we better head for Ashdown?"

"Righto. Time does pass, doesn't it? Down this hill, Marcy, and in a mile or so we'll meet the main road."

They were only a hundred feet from the main road when a front tire let go with a bang. Marcy swore softly under her breath and braked to a halt. She jumped out to inspect the tire and found it badly damaged, perhaps by a sharp stone.

Denis Howerth, standing beside her, shook his head. "I suppose we must send for help."

"What for?" Marcy asked, moving to the rear of the car. "You've got two good spares strapped on here. And here's the jack. Let's get to work."

She showed him how to work the jack, and as he raised the car, she found a tire iron and pried the casing from the rim. Finding the inner tube badly torn, she got a new tube and casing from the rear. The two of them worked the clincher beads into the rim of the wheel. In a very short time they had the new shoe in place and a perspiring Lord Wolverton was bending rhythmically up and down over the bicycle pump.

Marcy watched critically as the tire swelled. "That should do it, Denis," she said. "I wish we had some kind of little device which would tell us the tire pressure. But better than that, we need a tire that will run more than three thousand miles."

As they put the tools away Denis said, "The Dunlop people thought they had one, but they took them to the French road races and they failed miserably. It will come, though."

"It will have to," Marcy said, easing the car into the main road toward Ashdown.

As she stopped the car in the driveway and turned off the engine, Justin came up, new respect in his eyes. Denis said,

"Justin, we blew a tire. It's in the rear. I'm afraid it's too far gone, but see if you can repair it."

"You changed it, sir?" the chauffeur asked.

Denis shook his head, and nodded toward Marcy. The man looked at her, astonishment mirrored on his face. He whistled softly and went to get the ripped casing.

The fresh air had sharpened their appetites, and Marcy and Denis joined the others for an ample lunch. Afterward, at Samuel Jernigan's request, they had a demonstration of his Spyker tourer. Marcy would have loved to crawl underneath the chassis to inspect the four-wheel drive, but knew it would be most unladylike. She listened while Jernigan bragged about the car's fine Dutch workmanship.

As they stood there, Marcy heard from the direction of the gate the hum of a powerful engine. Now a runabout swept around the curve of the drive, a rakish two-seater, bright red of paint, its black top folded. The goggled driver braked to a stop behind the Spyker. The woman passenger, swathed in dust coat and heavy veil, stood up and with a little cry, extended her arms to Denis Howerth. Springing forward, he lifted her tenderly to the ground. Laughing, the woman pushed aside her veil; it was Kitti Carnesi.

"Ah, this cousin Carlo of mine, he drive like the madman," Kitti cried. "The horses shy, the hens they scatter, all the people scurry for safety. I am glad, Denis, I am here altogether in one piece." She pulled Denis' face down to hers and kissed him passionately. "I have missed you, my Denis, in that so-solid city of Amsterdam."

Marcy turned to look at the driver. He dropped his goggles around his neck and pushed back the bill of his motoring cap. He seemed in his late twenties, Marcy thought, rather handsome in a rugged sort of way. His eyes were black, alert, with a twinkle of humor in them as he watched his cousin. He leaped down from the car, and Denis shook hands and introduced him around. Marcy found herself liking this man instantly.

Denis, his arm around Kitti's shoulders, looked at the red runabout. "So this is the Ferroni Vinca," he said.

Carlo Ferroni's voice was pleasant, with only a trace of accent. "This is Vinca, though she has not yet been victorious. My latest model—my boys and I have worked around the clock to get her done on time to load on the boat to get her here. So she has not raced. Coming up from London, though, she has performed very well."

"With this madman at the wheel, she thunders through the big towns and the leetle villages like a wild elephant. I was scare' half to death!" Kitti cried. Then she laughed, in it the sound of silver bells. "I love it, though. The car so fast, so powerful, and Carlo handles it with such skill. Now, Denis darling, I am dusty and I am hungry. You have me shown to my room first, no?"

The butler unloaded the luggage from the car as Denis led Kitti inside. Jernigan, examining the runabout, said rather slyly to Ferroni, "Did you know that the national speed limit in England has just been raised to twenty miles an hour, Signor Ferroni? I would guess that you exceeded that this morning, maybe a time or two."

Marcy watched Carlo Ferroni's forehead wrinkle as he made a mental calculation. Then he beat his brow with the heel of his hand. "That is the law? Only thirty-two kilometers an hour? *Dio mio*, sometimes coming up here I was doing seventy kilos!" Then he chuckled. "I don't think any of your English bobbies could catch me, eh?"

"Whew! Not at that speed," Jernigan said, respect in his voice. "Confidentially, Sig. Ferroni, most of us bow to that speed limit more in the breach than the observance."

"Such a powerful machine as Vinca is mos' difficult to hold down," Ferroni said. He handed a small suitcase to the waiting butler, saying to the man, "I will be in shortly."

Turning to Marcy, he asked, "You are the motor enthusiast also, Miss Tarrant? Perhaps you would like to own a Ferroni Vinca. I will take you for a ride and you will come back convinced the Vinca is the finest car made anywhere."

"My, what confidence!" Marcy said. "I'll take you up on that, Count Ferroni, if you'll let me drive."

"Just Carlo, please," Ferroni said. "So you do drive? That is wonderful, for then you will appreciate even more the fine points of my beautiful machine. We will make a—what you call?—date very soon." He patted the dusty hood of the Vinca as if it were a beloved pet.

Marcy put a practical question to him. "How many Vincas have you built, Carlo?"

He hesitated, catching his lower lip between white teeth. Then he grinned. "You have found me out, *signorina*. My first car we patched together, built and rebuilt, an experiment. We learn much, build Number Two, pneumatic tires, bigger engine, many improvements. Twice she win races in Italy, once in France. We build two more, still improving, higher

power, better brakes. So my tiny factory, she has produce the grand total of four machines. *Voilà*, Ferroni Motors Number Four." He patted the sleek car again.

"But you are going into production," Marcy prompted.

"Very much so, I have already the building in Novara, where Ferronis have been the *padrones* for centuries. But the financing, Signa. Tarrant—" He shook his head and grimaced. "Money is tight. I bring Vinca to England hoping for advance orders to keep us going."

Jernigan, who had been listening, said, "You're doing things the hard way, *signor*. You should get a long line of bank credit, a big loan. Then build your factory, equip it, and you can turn out cars in quantity. That's the way we do it in the textile business."

"Ah, Mr. Jernigan, but your cloth is in universal demand. The automobile, she is a mere squalling infant. Bankers have been bitten by her once or twice and have become conservative. I cannot make them realize that in twenty years the horse, all horses, will be turned out to pasture by the motor car. And," he shrugged. "I have nothing left to mortgage." He smiled that magnetic smile that made Marcy smile back. "Well, things will work out, one way or another. Now, like my pretty cousin, I am hungry. Should we go in?"

Marcy explained that she and Samuel Jernigan had already lunched. Marcy watched Carlo Ferroni as he went inside, his stride brisk and athletic, his manner confident. In this brief encounter, she had an instant liking for Carlo Ferroni.

CHAPTER XVIII

At dinner that evening Marcy met the other motor buffs who had arrived at Ashdown. She was most favorably impressed by Charles Stewart Rolls. This third son of Lord Llangattock had a degree from Cambridge in mechanical science, but at twenty-four was best known as one of Britain's premier auto racers. A chance remark told Marcy that Rolls was planning to go heavily into auto sales, so she made a mental note to get him aside and discuss mutual problems.

Douglas Waverley, the rising M.P., and his wife had come in their forty-five-horsepower Napier. He was ruddy, voluble, mustached; his pretty wife, Norah, was typically strawberry-and-cream English. As a Member of Parliament, Waverley had been instrumental in the passage of the new speed limit law, which raised the limit from its absurd twelve miles an hour to twenty. (Before that the limit had been *four* miles per hour, and a man had to walk ahead of the car waving a red flag.)

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Marcy and her father managed to cut Charles Rolls out of the pack and find a corner where they could talk freely, out of others' earshot.

"Mr. Rolls, I'll be frank. We want to pick your brains," Tom Tarrant said. He looked at the young man through the blue smoke of his Habana cigar.

"Some people say that if I had any brains I wouldn't be driving racing cars," Charles Rolls answered, smiling. "I must confess I love speed, speed in any form. It's like a drug, it makes me feel free, like I was a whole man. To drive a machine to the ultimate limit of its performance, and at the same time test my own nerve, my own ability—ah, that is glorious, unmatched. But I'm sure the Tarrants would as soon forgo my dissertation on the excitement of high speed, and get down to business."

"Speed *is* business, Mr. Rolls," Marcy said. "My father and I are setting up a motor-car dealership in our home city of San Francisco. Lord Wolverton tells us you are about to em-

bark on a similar project in London. We thought we might discuss techniques, possible pitfalls, and such matters."

"Happy to tell you what I can. I've had my fingers burned a couple of times, though I'm now getting started. I have one advantage over you; my racing has provided a clientele, who accept my judgment on cars with few questions. Do you plan a large enterprise?"

"Yes," Marcy said. "Perhaps two expensive, de luxe makes, a middle line of lower cost, and if we can find it, a very inexpensive car for wide sales appeal."

"Good thinking," Charles Rolls said. He went on to give them tips from his own experience. They asked questions then. For some he had answers, for others he shook his head. "You see, my dear Tarrants, ours is such a baby industry. We build by trial and error. One needs both boldness and caution. The sticker is, which to employ in a given situation. You can be as reckless as H.J. Lawson, and have fake patents cost you a hundred thousand pounds sterling. Or you can be conservative like Saul Ledger, and sink fifty thou in a factory to make solid rubber tires, just as pneumatics are pushing solids clear off the map."

Trained in engineering, Charles Rolls applied this knowledge, along with a flair for salesmanship, in his newly planned auto agency. Marcy and Tom Tarrant found his frank comments shrewd and practical. He confessed that his fascination with speed was one motive for driving racing cars, but another was the advertising. He risked his neck in dangerous road racing, in which a number of men had been killed, to bring publicity to the business he was starting.

"The newspapers give a great play to motor races, especially if one of us drivers gets killed," he said with irony. "I get my name in the papers, and if I win I'm instantly an authority. This will bring people to my garage. Moreover, there's nothing like road racing to put a car to the test. It shows up faults and weak spots which can be strengthened or redesigned."

"Mr. Rolls, you're an engineer. I have the feeling the sales effort is not your final goal," Marcy said.

He hesitated before he answered. "Miss Tarrant, I do have a further goal. I want to build my own cars, not just any car, but the best damned car in the whole world, the *ne plus ultra* of automobiles. Every material tested over and over, every part machined like a fine watch, the assembly by loving

workmen with devoted care. It's a dream, it's a long way off, but it's always in my mind. And I will do it, I assure you."

Tom Tarrant put his cigar on the ashtray, and, reaching into his pocket, took out a card case. He handed Charles Rolls a business card. "Here's our address. I hope you will consider Tarrant Motors for a West Coast dealership of your car when it is perfected. For I strongly suspect the dream is much closer to perfection than you have admitted."

Rolls put the card away carefully. "Since you have made such a shrewd guess, sir, I'll tell you something which I ask that you do not repeat to anyone. I've come across an engineer named Frederick Royce, who has put together three cars. They are simple little machines with two-cylinder engines of ten horsepower. But they are beautifully made, with some new features of design that I think are what I'm looking for. I'm convinced that Fred Royce is my man."

"And I think Charles Rolls is ours, if he can build that dream car," Tom Tarrant said. "Any other gems of wisdom?"

"Just one. I've studied the market, and I'm certain that the key to sales volume, which you must have, is to advertise, advertise, advertise. Keep the name of Tarrant Motors before the public all the time. There are a dozen ways to do it. Oh, yes, one more thing, keep up a good back shop. If you fall down on service for the cars you sell, your name will be anathema. Good mechanics, good tools, all the factory handbooks, and a top-notch shop foreman. It will cut your worries in half."

Marcy and Tom Tarrant thanked the young man, and the three rejoined the main group. They found an argument had broken out. Among motor enthusiasts, argument could lead only to challenge. Already tentative rules had been drawn up for a road race. Each participant would ante fifty pounds sterling. The route would be from Ashdown to Peterborough post-office and return, a total of a bit over one hundred miles. It would lead mainly over lightly traveled roads. Already entered was the Powys Winton, Jernigan's Spyker, Lord Wolverton's Mercedes, and after a consultation with his cousin, Kitti Carnesi, Carlo Ferroni entered his Vinca.

Horace Howerth refused to compete in his Fiat, saying he was too old for that kind of foolishness. Charles Rolls passed also, since he thought as a professional racer it might be unfair. And with the greatest reluctance Douglas

Waverley declined to enter. "After working my tail off for the higher speed limit, imagine my embarrassment if I were caught breaking it! I'd never manage to shepherd a piece of automobile legislation through Commons again. So if you don't mind, Norah and I will serve as official starter and timekeeper."

The hundred-mile run would be grueling and wearisome, and everyone would have to rise early to have their machines lubricated and fueled and tuned by starting time. So the pleasant gathering broke up at a fairly early hour.

Marcy was leaving the drawing room when Carlo Ferroni intercepted her. "Miss Tarrant, my cousin Kitti will be riding in Lord Wolverton's car tomorrow. Would you be so kind as to ride as mechanic with me in my Vinca?"

"Why, that would be grand fun," Marcy said, pleased at the chance. "My father is riding with Samuel Jernigan in the Spyker, and I was doomed to stay here. Of course I'll go."

Those expressive eyes of his laughing with Marcy, he said, "We will have a wonderful day. You will come down early? I hear how you diagnose the Spyker, and how you fix the tire on the Mercedes. Maybe Vinca might need your attention."

"I hope not, but I'll be ready," she said. He gave her hand a light pressure, and raced up the curving staircase two steps at a time.

She started to follow, but stopped as an idea struck her. Returning to the drawing room, she found the head butler, who was supervising the cleanup of the big room. She asked, "Gerald, would you have a maid take me to the servants' wing? I must speak with Justin, Lord Wolverton's chauffeur, concerning the race tomorrow."

"Certainly, miss," the butler said imperturbably. "Alice, escort Miss Tarrant, please."

The large staff at Ashdown had a comfortable and commodious servants' quarters. Marcy waited in the parlor while Alice found Justin for her.

"Justin, you've heard about the great race, of course," Marcy said. "I would greatly appreciate it if you would do me a favor."

"Anything in my power, mum," Justin said, a bit uncomfortable in off-duty attire. Marcy smiled at him to put him at his ease.

"You and I are about the same size," she said. "If you

have a spare chauffeur's uniform, it would be worth ten pounds if you lent it to me for the race tomorrow."

He stared at her, the shock of her suggestion taut on his face. "But mum—a lady like you—would it be suitable? I mean, well, I don't want to sound critical-like, but—"

"It's a kind of joke, Justin," Marcy hurried to explain, knowing the man was puzzling over these crazy Americans. "And you realize, I'm sure, how much more practical your uniform will be if Signor Ferroni and I have motor repairs to make. A long dress is so clumsy. Come on, Justin, be a sport."

He rubbed his chin doubtfully. Then he smiled. "Blimey, Miss Tarrant, if I don't do it! For a young lady what knows as much about automobiles as you do—and you don't need to pay me no ten pounds for the lend of it, neither."

"Nonsense, Justin. I'd pay twenty pounds for the satisfaction of pulling off this little joke. Don't tell me you can't use the money."

"Well, you put it that way, a few quid ain't never unwelcome," he said, and hurried off to his room.

In a few minutes he was back with a pair of flared cavalry pants of green whipcord, a trim jacket to match it, a soft-collared shirt, and a pair of shiny riding boots. She held the jacket up to herself for size.

"By George, it'll do nice," Justin said. "A good thing I ain't awful big. I used to ride steeplechase until I got too heavy. That's when I learned to drive an autymobile. Uh, the rest of it you'll have to take care of yourself, the socks and—you know—"

"This is fine, Justin. I'll see that you get these back tomorrow evening." She put a note into his hand. "I'm warning you, though, we're going to beat you tomorrow."

The chauffeur chuckled. "With Miss Kitti riding with him, I doubt if Lord Wolverton will worry much about winning."

He wrapped the uniform and boots in newspaper and gave them to her. "Blimey, I think this'll be more fun by half. And Miss Tarrant, if I may say so as shouldn't, in them clothes you're going to make a handsome boy."

When Marcy rose at dawn, her aunt half-wakened. She asked a muffled question, but before Marcy could answer, Dora rolled over and went back to sleep. Marcy bathed and dressed carefully, having some difficulty with the unfamiliar fastenings and the buttons on the opposite side from wom-

en's garments. She struggled into the boots, thanking God that Justin had small feet, for they were exactly right.

She looked at herself in the pier glass. Justin was right; she did make a handsome boy. She twitched down the skirt of the jacket, which fitted well enough, although a little snug across the bosom. Going quietly into her bedroom, she slipped her billfold into her jacket pocket and was ready. *No, not quite,* she thought, wondering what to wear on her flaming mop. Then she remembered a little jockey cap, the kind that had been all the rage for cycling in Boston. She found it in her suitcase, and pulled it over her hair, tucking the stray Titian locks under it. *Now I do look like a boy,* she decided.

Closing the door of the suite softly behind her, she went down the stairs. Though it was very early, she could hear already the sound of engines tuning up. So she was by no means the first zealot down for breakfast.

The breakfast room was empty except for the maid Alice, standing behind a serving table of covered pots and chafing dishes. The first glance the girl gave Marcy was cursory, then she looked again. Her mouth dropped open and she gave a strangled exclamation. But with the disciplined aplomb of the English servant, Alice regained her composure. In a tone perfectly normal she asked, "What will it be this morning, mum?"

"A prune or two, and toast and coffee," Marcy said. "I've been eating too heavily and I'm afraid I'll lose my figure. Besides, I'm in rather a hurry."

Alice served Marcy from the buffet, and Marcy ate quickly and she drained her coffee cup. "Thank you, Alice."

"Yes, mum," the girl said. Then she tittered. "You make a nice boy, mum. A very pretty boy, I must say."

"I hope so, Alice," Marcy said, laughing, and went out.

The cars in the race were gathered in the stable area. The men working on them were so intent that they did not look up as Marcy approached. Carlo Ferroni had the bonnet of the Vinca up, and was leaning over the front mudguard, tinkering with the innards of the engine. Quietly, Marcy came up behind him.

Affecting as deep a voice as she could manage, she asked, "Hey, mister, you need a mechanic to ride with you?"

Ferroni did not turn around. "Go away," came his muffled reply. "I have a riding mechanic. Go away."

Marcy picked up a wrench from a tool roll on the ground

near the front wheel. Less than gently, she dug the rounded end into Ferroni's ribs. She said, "Now, mister, I ain't used t'being treated so mean. Y' want me to bend this spanner across your skull?"

Ferroni came up out of the engine like a turtle emerging from its shell. His face was angry and impatient. He stared at Marcy for a moment, then he recognized her and broke into a roar of laughter. "*Dio mio*, it's Miss Marcy! Where did you get that costume? A mos' pretty *raggazzo* you make, I must say. You put on this uniform to ride with me?"

"Like it?" she asked. She turned gracefully in front of Carlo as a fashion model does. She was beginning to get used to the unfamiliar feel of the masculine clothes, and was now enjoying her masquerade.

"I like you very much," he said admiringly. "You have a figure, dear Marcy, of the most excellent. Not many women could wear that outfit with such telling effect."

"It's practical, too," she said loftily. "How's Vinca's mood this morning?"

"She had a touch of bellyache, but I cleaned her out and she's all right now. This damned—excuse me, Marcy, but I must say it—this double-damned petrol they sell! Dirt, stones, other unnameable things in it, they get into my engine and ph-f-f-f-t, she stops. Petrol should all be filtered through a chamois, but it takes so much time."

"When the roads are filled with cars, the fuel dealers will have to sell us clean gasoline and good oil," Marcy said.

Carlo slammed the bonnet down and tightened the leather straps which prevented rattling. He said, "Get in the driver's seat, Marcy. I will crank and we'll see if Vinca is in a happier mood."

Though the driver's seat was adjusted for Carlo's long legs, Marcy could move up a little and reach the pedals. It pleased her that she felt so free to move in her man's attire. She saw Carlo watching her with a little smile of amusement. She pushed a stray tendril of hair under her cap, and reached for the spark lever.

Carlo pulled the crank and the Vinca rumbled into life. Marcy adjusted spark and gas levers, and the engine settled into a contented burble as it idled. Ear cocked, Carlo listened for a moment. He nodded in satisfaction, and Marcy shut off the engine.

Charles Rolls came from the house, handsome and relaxed in his gray Irish tweed suit. A disturbing thought came to

Marcy. She said softly, "Carlo, Mr. Rolls disqualified himself because he was a professional. Are you sure your own position might not be questioned?"

"I think not," Carlo said. "I have talked to Charles Rolls last night, I want to be mos' fair too. He said it was all right, I drive in only one race, then we break down and don't finish. Our other races, I ride as mechanic; it is more important to me to see how my cars run than to win silver cups."

Just before seven o'clock, Douglas and Norah Waverley joined the group. Norah Waverley looked very pretty in a striped silk blouse and a tweed skirt that ended above her shoe tops. Her dark hair was crowned by a straw boater with a gay band of ribbon. She carried a clipboard and a formidable array of pencils.

Waverley looked English and handsome in casual clothes, a Panama hat shielding his eyes from the bright sun. He called, "Everybody ready? Then we'll get started."

The drivers had drawn lots the night before for the starting sequence. Jernigan's Spyker was first out. As the Waverleys waited at the starting line, Norah Waverley's glance found Marcy. She gave a slight gasp. "Why, what a handsome chauffeur we have here!" she exclaimed. She leaned closer to Marcy. "How often have I wished for such a dress when Douglas and I are touring. But the most daring I managed was to wear cycling bloomers. I admire your fortitude, Miss Tarrant."

"A case of needs must, Mrs. Waverley," Marcy said. "It's not only more comfortable and practical, but it is safer around moving machinery."

"It is," Norah Waverley agreed. "Perhaps all women will wear such sensible attire one day, no matter what the men say."

Carlo had drawn the last starting position, so he and Marcy watched the others start. The Spyker pulled up to the line, with Samuel Jernigan and Tom Tarrant in the back seat, Jernigan's chauffeur driving. Norah Waverley made a notation on her clipboard, and Waverley stood watch in hand, his right hand raised. Charles Rolls stood at the line with an improvised flag of green cloth.

Waverley's hand dropped, Rolls snapped the flag down in front of the car, the Spyker's engine roared, and in a spray of gravel the big car sped down the curving driveway, Jernigan and Tom Tarrant waving at the crowd. It rolled through

the main gate of Ashdown and was gone. The great Luton-Peterborough Motor Race was under way.

Fifteen minutes later, Denis Howerth's Mercedes started, with Justin, the chauffeur, at the wheel. Denis, in motoring coat, leather cap and goggles, was in the back seat, with Kitti Carnesi beside him. Though Kitti looked lovely and fragile in duster and veil, Marcy had a hunch that underneath that facade of delicacy, Kitti was as tough and tempered as a Toledo blade.

Sir Henry Powys was next in his big American Winton. He was driving, with Ethelda sitting primly beside him. As soon as the Winton was through the gate, Carlo drove the Vinca to the line, ready for the green flag. Carlo and Marcy adjusted their goggles, and Marcy gripped hard the edge of her bucket seat.

"Time!" Waverley cried, and Rolls swung the starter's flag. Carlo stepped on the foot pedal, let out the clutch, and the Vinca sprang ahead. The powerful surge pinned Marcy against the back of the red leather seat, and the tires squealed on the macadam drive. As they went from the paved to the gravel section of the curving drive, the Vinca gathered speed, spinning a rooster-tail of dust behind it.

They shot through the main gate and Carlo turned the car north toward Luton. The road ahead was straight and empty. The Vinca thundered up the easy grade between the hedgerows, and the speed mounted. Marcy gasped. She had never ridden this fast before.

"It's glorious!" she cried, over the roar of the engine, the words snatched from her lips by the rush of air over the windscreen.

Carlo gave her a quick sideward glance. "We're out to win this!" he shouted. "These Englishmen must know how fast and powerful my Vinca is. So hang on tight, and say a prayer at every corner."

She laughed, but the laugh was lost as the car hit a dip in the road with a tremendous jar. Thereafter she was too busy hanging on to make further conversation.

CHAPTER XIX

The Vinca stormed through Biggleswade and raced north. Nearly to St. Neots, Carlo braked suddenly as they approached a stone bridge where the road crossed a small tributary of the Ouse. A touring car was pulled off the road, and a man was pouring water from a pail into the steaming radiator. Nearby, Ethelda Powys was gathering wildflowers from the bank beside the road.

"Can we help?" Marcy called, as Carlo slowed the Vinca to a crawl.

"No, we'll be all right," Sir Henry called back. "My radiator sprang a leak. I've plugged it with gutta-percha, and we'll be on our way in a few minutes."

"Good, we'll see you in Peterborough," Marcy cried, and Carlo shifted into second gear.

The road became more crooked, and Carlo was forced to drive slower. Able to be heard again, Marcy said, "Carlo, you said you needed money for your venture. Is there none in Italy, no assets to mortgage, no wealthy friends?"

His snort might have been a laugh, but there was no amusement in it. "Everything I own is already mortgaged to the hilt, by my father and my father's father. The *castello*, very moldy, very damp, is rented each year to wealthy Englishmen. Novara, dear Marcy, is not a prosperous region. Of rich men we have few, and of rich friends I have none. They have money, yes, but at twenty percent, twenty-five percent interest, with full guarantee and no risk. I ask, they say, "A factory in Milano, in Turino, maybe we talk business. In Novara—nothing doing."

"Why Novara?" Marcy asked. "Why not Milan?"

He braked hard, tooled the car around an abrupt corner, dodged a wain pulled by a two-horse team. He did not accelerate again until he was sure he would not startle the horses. As the car picked up speed, he said, "Marcy, I am Count Carlo Ferroni of Novara, where my family has held land for a thousand years. We have fought for it and shed our blood for it from the time of Caesar's legions. We are very

poor, Count Ferroni and all his people. But *por Dio*, I cannot abandon Novara. To help my people, I must build my factory there. They work to make my motor car, they can live and die where they have lived so long, they do not have to go to Milano to look for jobs or to starve."

"It's hard to pull up roots," Marcy agreed.

He thumped the steering wheel with the heel of his hand. "Such deep roots as we have, Marcy. I am hoping that Vinca here is the key that will unlock good times for Carlo Ferroni and for all Novara."

Marcy was familiar with the surprisingly large sums of money needed for any commercial enterprise. She knew what it had cost her father in his construction business, and what it was taking to get Tarrant Motors started. Yet she could not discourage this sincere young man. She said, "Carlo, we all must dream, though the dream seems impossible to attain. I do have an idea. Tarrant Motors has some good financial connections in Paris. I'll have our friends send their people to Novara to look into your project. Perhaps they'll lend you the needed funds. Since your risk is high, their terms will be high, I warn you."

He slowed for an angrily barking dog on the road shoulder. Then the Vinca proved too much for the collie, and it dashed for the hedge with its tail between its legs.

"Marcy, if you would try," he said. "I will pay any price to get started. I will leave them in escrow one arm and one leg, if they ask that. If you can find me such a loan, I will be your humble slave for life." Impulsively, he reached his right hand over and covered hers. "Already I think I am, without that."

"Don't count too much on it, Carlo," she warned him. She did not dare tell him that Jacques had expressed interest in the motor industry for Costain *Frères's* investments. *When I see Jacques,* she mused, *I think I'll remind him that he owes me a debt.*

They came into the village of Huntingdon. Carlo slowed and drove carefully through the narrow cobbled streets. As they slowed for a street intersection, Marcy had a sudden lift of pleasure in a wooden arrow on a post, pointing to the right, the wording "St. Ives." She wondered, if Carlo turned there would they meet that man with all the wives and cats and kittens? Unfortunately, the Peterborough road stretched north.

Driving down the main street of Ramsey, Marcy saw the

Wolverton Mercedes stopped in front of a tea shop. Denis must be treating the lovely Kitti to morning tea, for it was not yet noon. Carlo must have reasoned along the same lines, for he asked, "Are you hungry?"

"Not yet," Marcy said. "Not with the Spyker still ahead."

"Good girl," Carlo said, and pressed down on the gas pedal.

They caught the Spyker before they reached Peterborough. They found the Dutch car pulled off the road, its left front wheel up on the jack. Samuel Jernigan, Tom Tarrant, and the chauffeur had their coats off, working to repair the tire.

Carlo stopped the Vinca. "Can we lend a hand?" he asked.

"We've got 'er about licked," Tom Tarrant said, rolling down his shirt sleeves. He frowned as Marcy jumped down and come over to the Spyker. He said, "Marcy, you look like a floozie in that get-up. But you're as cute as a bug's ear, just the same."

Marcy laughed. She patted her father's cheek. "Thanks, Daddy. These clothes are practical, and very comfortable. When we get back to the States I'm starting a campaign to make trousers just as fashionable for women as they are for men."

Tom Tarrant snorted. "You know how far you'll get, Emmeline Pankhurst. That'll be the day. Say, how's the car running?"

"Like clockwork," she said. As Carlos helped the others, she drew her father aside. "Daddy, we should have the Vinca. It would be great for San Francisco, it's powerful enough for our steep hills. But he needs money to get into production. When we get to Paris, I'm going to put in a word with Jacques Demaret for a loan from Costain *Frères*. I might be able to swing it."

"Costains, eh? They'll want his eyeteeth and his mother's wedding ring for security," Tarrant said bluntly. "But go ahead, mavourneen. He seems like a fine young man, he's got a good car, and he needs the chance, if you can twist the arm of this Jacques Demaret. Another thing: I still don't like any part of the Costains, so count me out of any social visit with them."

"I'll make your excuses, though I'll miss you. After we've finished our business with our own banking houses, you can make the rounds of the French auto factories on your own. That might be enlightening as well as interesting."

He sounded relieved at her acquiescence. "A hell of a lot

more interesting than catching cold in some moldy French chateau nine hundred years old without central heating."

She grinned at him, and climbed back into the Vinca. Carlo dusted his hands and pulled the crank. The warm engine started immediately. Marcy waved to her father as Carlo turned the car north toward Peterborough.

The city was ancient but bustling, boasting brickyards and textile factories. They passed the magnificent old cathedral of St. Peter. A passer-by directed them to the post-office, and Carlo dashed in with an envelope. He brought it back stamped with the official date and time, for in addition to the money pool and trophy, there was a smaller trophy for each of the legs going and returning.

After some searching, they found a motor garage where gasoline and oil could be obtained for the Vinca. While Carlo supervised the fueling and care of his car, Marcy bought bread, butter, cheese, sliced ham, and a bottle of claret.

They left Peterborough, and not far south of the city, Marcy directed Carlo to turn off into a side lane. Beside a tinkling little stream, Marcy made a picnic lunch in the shade of great oaks.

All too soon Carlo drained his wine cup and took the used dishes to the water to rinse them. When he returned Marcy had the rest of the picnic gear stowed. She added the dishes and closed the box. She gave Carlo a sketchy salute and said, "Ready when you are, captain."

He looked at her, his dark eyes intent on her face. He drew a deep breath. "A shame we must go, Marcy. This place—" he waved an expressive hand toward the glade, "it is the kind, I think, that makes Englishmen love their island above all other lands." He gave Marcy a hand up into the car.

When he had started the engine and gotten in, she said, "I know what you mean, Carlo. I can imagine a knight in shining armor charging down the lane on his great courser, his lance low, his shield with its strange device leveled in front of him."

"And he would slay this fire-spouting dragon, and rescue the beautiful damsel," Carlo said, laughing. He backed and filled to get the Vinca turned around.

Yet he did not drive off down the lane to the road. He stopped and took the car out of gear. He looked at Marcy intently and said, "Take off, please, thé cap."

She complied, shaking out the glowing mass of red hair that reached her shoulders. "Like this, Carlo?" she asked.

"Ah, Marcy, Marcy, what a lovely woman you are," he said in a hushed voice. "In all my life I have never met anyone who so quickly charmed me. You are mos' lovely to the eye, but more you are friendly, you are understanding. Promise you and your father and aunt will come to Novara after you have been to Germany. I cannot equal the hospitality of a Lord Wolverton or a Prince Rupert, but I want you to know my homeland."

"I'll try, Carlo," said Marcy. "That's all I can promise. We have such a full schedule, and we must return to America in September. But I'd love to come, so we'll try."

He looked disappointed, then his patrician face lighted. "Think of this, Marcy, our great port of Genoa is quite near Novara. Why not take an Italian liner home from there, instead of some other port? A fine ship from Genoa to New York, fine food, a pleasant journey, I promise you."

"I'll talk it over with Daddy," she said doubtfully. "But now, Carlo, we have a race to win. *Avanti!*"

"I like very much to win," he said, putting the car in gear. He winked at her. "You see, I borrow the fifty pounds for the winner's pool from my sweet cousin Kitti!"

As the Vinca sped south, they did not see the Spyker again. Either they had missed it in Peterborough, or it had gone past while they ate their picnic lunch. They hadn't seen Lord Wolverton's Mercedes since that morning in Ramsey. But someone was ahead, for as they entered the village of St. Neots, they could see a plume of dust to the south.

In St. Neots, the passage of so many motor cars in one day had brought the village to life. Along the narrow, restricted streets, the local people lined the walks to catch a glimpse of the snorting monsters. Marcy smiled when she saw a gaggle of small boys perched high in a tree at a street corner, almost invisible among the leaves.

Just beyond, Carlo pulled to the side of the street and stopped, to let the oncoming car past. It was the Winton of Sir Henry Powys. He must have managed repairs, for the car was moving along at a good clip. It surged past them with a rattle of pebbles and a gay tootle of the horn. Along the street the spectators gave a hurrah for the speeding car.

Carlo put the car in gear. Before he let out the clutch, from behind them came a wild scream. Marcy saw men and women running toward the tree in which the small boys had perched. She made out a body lying limp and unmoving on the grass.

"Wait, Carlo," she cried. "Someone has been hurt."

She jumped out as he shut off the engine. He followed her to the knot of people at the base of the tree. She pushed her way through, and knelt beside the body of the boy, since no one seemed to be doing anything.

"It's Jimmy," one woman exclaimed. "Oh, won't 'is mother give it 'im when she gets 'ere."

There was blood coming from the boy's mouth and nose; he was white and unconscious and frighteningly still, though breathing.

Marcy looked up at the crowd. "This boy is hurt badly. Will someone get the doctor?"

"There's no doctor in St. Neots, mum," a man said. "Nearest one is at Huntingdon, and he's on holidays."

"This child must have a doctor," Marcy said in despair. "And he should be in a hospital."

"That would mean Cambridge, then," the man said. "And that's a mortal long way from here. The boy might be dead by the time he got there. Ah, here's Mrs. Morgan now."

A young woman broke through the crowd, her face as pale as death. She knelt and gathered Jimmy's bleeding body into her arms, rocking him. "Who done this awful thing? Who hurt my Jimmy?"

"Nobody, Mrs. Morgan," one of the boys said. "We was up in that tree, trying to see the motor cars and Jim, he leant too far. He guv a yell and he went sailin' through the branches and hit the ground."

"Oh, what will I do? What will I do?" the woman wailed, hugging the child.

"We've got to get him to a doctor," Marcy said. She looked up at Carlo. Reading her thought, he nodded.

"We'll take him," he said. He stooped and gathered the limp form into his arms. He said, "Come along, ma'am."

"What—what are you doing with Jamie?" Mrs. Morgan asked.

"We're taking him to the hospital in Cambridge," Marcy told her. "Come along, Mrs. Morgan. You can hold him on your lap. We'll get you there in a hurry."

"Me ride in a motor car?" the woman cried, abashed. "Oh, I could never do that."

"Then you stay, we'll take him," Marcy said impatiently. "There's no time to lose."

"Then I must go too," the woman said, her face pale.

At the Vinca Marcy helped the woman into the passenger

seat. Carlo lifted the little boy's body to Mrs. Morgan, and she cradled the boy in her arms, moaning softly.

The bucket seats of the Vinca were quite comfortable for two people, but impossible for more. Carlo had gained space by using an oval gasoline tank instead of the usual cylindrical one, and boxing it in, making a sort of trunk. Marcy seated herself on the oval fuel tank behind the seats, fitting her feet into the space between them and clutching at the seat backs.

Carlo engaged the gears and the Vinca surged forward, turning east at the next corner toward Cambridge. Afterwards, Marcy would insist that Carlo drove the twenty miles in less than twenty minutes. Fortunately, Mrs. Morgan was too engrossed in her son to be more than peripherally frightened. Nor was Marcy afraid, though she was taking a pounding from the uncushioned box she was sitting on. The tremendous speed of the Vinca enthralled her, and she remembered Charles Rolls speaking of his love of speed; "it's like a drug, it lifts you as nothing else can."

Mrs. Morgan had been to Cambridge before, so she was able to point out to Carlo the route to the hospital, as he slowed at the outskirts of the town. She sobbed that her father had died there of the cancer and that her son was going to die there too.

The Vinca's tires squealed on the roadway as Carlo braked hard in front of the hospital. He took the boy from Mrs. Morgan, and Marcy, her arm around the woman's shoulders, led her in the door after Carlo.

Marcy and Carlo waited on a bench near the entrance while Jamie was inside the closed doors of the examining room. Minutes passed, a half-hour. Marcy told Carlo it was good of him to sacrifice the race this way.

Carlo frowned. "These country folk, Marcy, they are like my people of Novara. They need someone like a father to take care of them. Without us, they would be confused, they would waste time. Maybe the little boy would die. I could not leave them, Marcy. I must help them if I can."

"Even though it costs you the race, the winner's pool, a chance to show the quality of the Vinca?" she asked, looking at him intently.

He shrugged. Then a smile came, lighting his tanned face. "So, there will be other races for Vinca. This race, what is it compared to a life? Maybe Jimmy grows up now to be a great man, a general, a lord mayor, who knows?"

Marcy put strong hands on his shoulders and turned Carlo to face her. She kissed him full on the lips, tears blurring her vision.

He put an arm across her shoulders and hugged her tight. "Maybe I am disappointed, a little. But we are Spartan, you and I, eh? The fox gnaws at our vitals, but we don't let anyone know we are in pain. Life is full of disappointments, dear Marcy."

Before she could answer, the door of the infirmary opened. Mrs. Morgan came out with one of the doctors. One look at the woman's face told Marcy the news was favorable.

"You're friends of the Morgans?" the doctor asked. "Well, I'm happy to tell you that the lad will be all right. A broken clavicle, numerous bruises and contusions, but the blood at his mouth came from a bitten lip and not a skull fracture, thank God. He does have a concussion, so we'll keep him here a day or two, though I'd wager a fiver he'll be begging to go home tomorrow. Good thing you got the boy here quickly, just the same."

After the doctor had gone, Marcy said, "I'm so glad, Mrs. Morgan. Now tell us, what do you want to do?"

"Jimmy's me only child, and my husband's away at sea, so I have no need to rush back to St. Neots. By the grace of God I have a niece here at Cambridge. She'll put me up for the few days I'll need. My, won't Elva be envious when I tell her about my ride in a motor car!"

"You'd have enjoyed it more if you hadn't been worrying about Jimmy," Marcy said. Taking the woman's hand, she pressed two ten-pound notes into it. She closed the callused, toilworn hands over the money. "I want you to use this for the hospital, Mrs. Morgan. And tell Jamie to stay out of tall trees after this."

"I will, mum. And God bless the both of you. You are—you are just the finest couple I ever met." The woman couldn't finish. Tears streaming down her face, she took Carlo's hand in one of hers, Marcy's in the other. Bending down, she kissed the hands, humbly, gratefully.

Carlo drove the winding road from Cambridge to St. Neots at a less breakneck pace, yet he managed to make good time. He took a byway and came out on the main road again just north of Bedford. As they turned south, Marcy tried to calculate how much time their errand of mercy had cost them. She was dismayed to find the answer was almost two hours. *At least sixty miles,* she thought—*even the Mercedes may*

have reached Peterborough, turned, and be ahead of us by now. She started to tell Carlo, but when she saw that he was relaxed and unworried, she kept her peace.

The Winton, too, had passed them, they learned, for at a bridge over a small stream they found Sir Henry again adding water to his steaming radiator. Carlo stopped the Vinca.

"Going great guns until a few minutes ago," Sir Henry said. "Then my gutta-percha repair melted and the radiator went dry. I'll have her patched in a trice and be on our way."

"Any news of the others?" Marcy asked.

Ethelda Powys said, "Lord Wolverton's Mercedes has a broken spring, so he's limping along. You should catch him up easily. The Spyker, though, is far ahead. Jernigan may be home free by this time. I'm surprised to see you; we thought you were leading the pack."

"We had—" Marcy began.

"Some bad luck," Carlo interrupted. "A spot of ignition trouble. We'll go on, and see you at dinner, eh?"

The Vinca was moving fast, far down the road, before Marcy asked, "You didn't want to mention the little boy?"

"It might sound like a lame excuse," he said.

Marcy nodded. It was the right attitude among these sporting Englishmen. And his stand gave her an insight into the personal pride that was part of his nature. Pride and compassion—the sympathy he had shown for Jimmy, the unquestioning sacrifice of his own interests to help the boy, had earned her boundless admiration.

They caught up with a cloud of dust and found it was being raised by the limping Mercedes. Justin, the chauffeur, raised a gauntleted hand and grinned, as if amused to see his uniform speeding past. Marcy saw Denis and Kitti in the tonneau, quite relaxed and smiling. Marcy saw why they were so free from worry, why Kitti's face was so prettily flushed, when Denis raised a wine bottle in salute, and took a swig from it as the Vinca passed gingerly on the narrow road.

As Carlo picked up speed again, Marcy cried, "Why, Carlo, that leaves only the Spyker!"

His answer was to push the foot throttle down another notch. "We may still make a creditable finish," he said.

They reached the outer streets of Luton, and Carlo slowed down. Once past into the country, he pushed the Vinca hard. Marcy held on for dear life as the powerful car rushed along the final straight, with Ashdown looming in the distance.

Marcy guessed they were doing better than forty miles an hour.

"Carlo, look! There's a car. The Spyker!" she cried.

"Hang on," he said, and fed more gas to the engine. The Vinca rocked and swerved, but Carlo held it to the road with an iron grip on the wheel. "They had more tire trouble, I'll bet you," he said. "Gave us our chance."

Now through the dust they saw that it was indeed the Spyker. Gravel from its wheels splattered the body and the windscreen of the Vinca as Carlo pulled over to pass. They were gaining, when Carlo had to brake so hard the Vinca swerved, the tires screaming, for they were at the gate of Ashdown.

Triumphantly, the Spyker sped up the curving drive to the mansion house, the road too narrow for Carlo to pass. The two cars pulled up as one at the main door, with Norah Waverley jotting the times down on her clipboard.

Jernigan jumped down jubilantly from the big car, Tom Tarrant followed more slowly, favoring his lame leg. In the Vinca, Carlo sat quiet, smiling dejectedly. Marcy reached over to catch his hand, comforting him.

Horace Howerth rushed up, hand outstretched. "A famous run, famous!" he exclaimed. "Congratulations to the winner. Your car has proven a most noble beast, and you've won the pool and the trophy. Please see me later, I must talk to you about purchasing your touring model. I simply must have one."

Carlo looked bewildered as he shook hands with the older gentleman. Then as Charles Rolls and the Waverleys came up, realization dawned on him.

He banged the heels of his hands against his temples. "*Dio mio*, I have forgotten the time allowance!" he exclaimed. He turned to Marcy and put his arm around her. "You have brought me luck, dear Marcy. I salute you."

He pulled her close and his lips met hers in an ardent kiss. Marcy, thrilling to it, felt her heart leap.

CHAPTER XX

On the Channel steamer, and later on the boat train to Paris, Marcy was in a mood to match the weather, which was gloomy, gray with fog. This day was such a letdown, so empty, after the sunny relaxed atmosphere of Ashdown. The pleasant company of her new friends, the graciousness of Lady Wolverton, the excitement of the Great Motor Race with Carlo Ferroni. Marcy had been given a glimpse of a world she had known only in books.

And at Ashdown she had met Carlo. She felt in the Count's complex nature strengths that seemed more and more admirable to her as time passed. He was intelligent, optimistic and compassionate; she had met other men, but Carlo was the first who seemed to be a complete man. Was she falling in love?

A soft rain was falling as they left the train at the Gare du Nord. Outside Tom Tarrant searched for a conveyance to their hotel, amid the milling mass of hansom cabs, chaises, phaetons and landaus struggling for position. When he found a cab, Marcy took over as a courier for the trio, since she had the most skill in French. The mustachioed driver of the cab they hired seemed pleased at getting these rich *Américains* as fares. But his dreams of a hefty overcharge and a generous tip vanished as Marcy gave him their destination in fluent French.

Marcy left the few Paris business affairs in her father's hands while she and Dora explored Paris, shopping in chic and exotic stores, visiting Notre Dame and the tomb of Napoleon and *la tour Eiffel* and the other historic monuments so familiar to them from their reading.

Immediately on their arrival, Marcy had sent a note to Jacques Demaret at his office of Costain *Frères*, with the name of their hotel. By messenger two days later came a formal invitation to spend a long weekend at Chateau Orient, in Compiègne. It contained specific instructions on the time of the train they should take, and an assurance they would

be met. The regrets that M. Tarrant would not be coming were perfunctory.

Marcy sent off an immediate acknowledgment and acceptance to Mme. Demaret, her note very French, very formal, full of punctilio and protocol. *I'll show the old girl I know the ropes*, she thought wickedly.

She was disturbed because she had heard nothing from Jacques, but the warm and friendly note she received from him the day before she and Dora were to leave for Compeigne explained:

My darling:

Maman tells me you have accepted her invitation to Chateau Orient. How wonderful! And how devastating that I have been unable to be with you in Paris. I have been on business for the house in the south of France, and have just now returned. And alas, I cannot arrive at Chateau Orient until Sunday morning, since I must go to Dijon tomorrow.

I am counting the hours until I can feast on the sight of your beautiful face. Please, we must have long talks, and long hours *alone* together. Until Sunday the Chevalier Moreau, father to my late brother's wife, will be happy to show you our lovely countryside. I think he has already fallen in love with your aunt, from the picture I have painted of her.

Until I can again hold you in my arms, impatiently I am

Your Jacques

Marcy was smiling as she put the note back in its envelope. *Dear Jacques,* she thought, *more polished than Romeo himself, and such a sweet damned liar.* She thought quite tenderly of him, with still a residual pleasure in the romantic interlude on the *Lucania.* After the friendly straightforward men she had met at Ashdown, she could see through Jacques's façade of extravagant sentiment. He was handsome, he was skilled, he was ingenious, Marcy thought; he was practiced in the tricks to win a girl's heart. But she was less of a school girl than she was when she had met Jacques, even less than she had been on that January night when Paul Costain had taught her a bitter lesson. She saw things as a woman now.

Marcy journeyed with Dora Laughlin by train on Friday morning to Compiègne, nestled beside the Somme, through lovely green countryside. Strange, Marcy thought, while

England didn't look *foreign* to an American, France did. The architecture, the trains, the great estates, all had an exotic look. Only once had she seen it in North America, and that was the region around Montreal.

At the Compiègne depot they were met by a luxurious victoria, varnish and glass sparkling, drawn by a team of matched black horses, proudly plumed and check-reined. The liveried footman stowed their bags in the carriage and took his place, arms folded, beside the liveried coachman. With a crack of whip, a rattle of wheels, and a staccato beat of horses' hooves, the victoria spun through the town and down a road from a Millet painting between pollard poplars. The day had turned bright and sunny, pleasantly warm after the spell of rain which had brought gray cool weather to Paris.

Chateau Orient was fairly near the town. It was a gracious structure, quite extensive, centered in exquisitely tended grounds. It had a wealth of formal gardens, their bushes shaped amusingly by topiary art. Trim walks led through the grounds. Artful fountains, marble statues, an arbor, and a miniature lake added to the delightful picture. Still, it was rather forbidding, Marcy thought, not warm like Ashdown. It shouted at one of wealth beyond counting.

As the butler and footman brought in their luggage, Marcy and Dora were met by a handsome gentleman of middle age, who bowed over their hands with courtly grace. He said, *"Je suis*—pardon me, I am Robert Duplessis, Chevalier Moreau. Welcome to Chateau Orient, dear ladies."

They introduced themselves, and followed Duplessis into a drawing room encrusted in silver-gilt, opulent with ormolu, oil paintings in gold frames, Aubusson carpets, a room fairly exuding wealth. Even the Chevalier seemed ill at ease in it.

Marcy took off her gloves. She said, "Until I had his note, I didn't know Jacques was not an only child."

"He is now," the Chevalier said, shaking his head. "He had a brother, married to the only child of myself and my late wife. The young man was killed in a tragic accident while hunting. He was followed to the grave shortly after by my daughter, from grief, it is said."

The conversation, Marcy saw, was directed mainly to her aunt, and Dora was most attentive, seemingly quite fascinated by this dapper Frenchman. Duplessis was impeccably groomed, though his high collar and silk cravat were a bit passé, giving him an old-world look. His curly hair was

thick, and graying only slightly at the temples. Gray touched a full mustache, over a firm, mobile mouth. His eyes were a gentle blue.

He said in his courteous manner, "Mme. Demaret has sent her regrets that she will not be able to arrive from Paris until Sunday. Some unexpected business matter, I presume. We will have other guests, an English couple, an Austrian banker and his wife, and two Costain cousins, maiden ladies from the south of France. I am instructed—I am pleased to be your host until the family has arrived. Ah, I see Mariette signal that your suite is ready. Mariette, kindly take the ladies up."

Marcy and Dora followed the trim maid up the sweep of the great circular staircase, down a short hall, down a long hall, into a wing. Mariette showed them into the suite, which was of two bedrooms with a central sitting room, and a bath big enough to throw a barn dance in. The fixtures gleamed with gold plate and the water closet and bidet were of sturdily massive porcelain. Marcy suppressed a giggle, thinking it too bad the suite was so modern. Otherwise they would probably have sterling silver slopjars, like the Claus Spreckels mansion back home.

After Mariette had helped her stow things away, and departed, Marcy asked her aunt, "What do you think of the Chevalier?"

"He's sweet, isn't he?" Dora said warmly. "And such a gentleman. Marcy, what is his position at Chateau Orient?"

"No more than poor relation," Marcy said. "Jacques told me a little about him. Robert Duplessis has no fortune, so he earns his bread and butter as a sort of major-domo of the estate. He bosses the gardeners and the stablehands, and the other outside staff, a good many people in a place as huge as this. He oversees its transportation and construction and repairs. I gather that he has nothing to say about the house servants."

Marcy and Dora donned evening dresses they had bought in Paris, closer fitted, daringly low in the neckline. They had been assured they were "the very latest, mademoiselle, very chic, very *à la môde*."

When Dora was dressed, she came into the sitting room and posed for inspection, arms extended. Marcy said admiringly, "How very beautiful, Aunt Dora. I've never seen you looking prettier."

A touch of pink rose in Dora's cheeks. "Do you really

think so? Do you think the Chevalier will like it? It does show a great deal of bare skin, and—uh, curves. Will the Chevalier think it a bit extreme?"

"Nonsense!" Marcy said, adjusting one of her aunt's shoulder straps. "He'll love it. You're not an old lady, darling. When a woman has a figure and a bosom as striking as yours, she should make the most of them, and this dress does that."

Dora looked at herself again in the mirror, preening. "Well, I do have a nice bustline, and I'm not fat. You're right, Marcy. I'd like to parade in this in front of Claribel."

"The Chevalier will have to do. Come along now, or we'll be late."

Robert Duplessis, presiding at the long table as substitute host, placed Marcy at his left, and Dora at his right. All through the meal the Chevalier directed only as many words to Marcy as politeness dictated. Most of the time he conversed quite wittily with Dora. This left Marcy to the company of the Austrian banker, Herr Brandt, but Marcy did not mind. She was happy with the way her aunt was blossoming under the sun of the Chevalier's attention. She had never seen Dora so animated, so outgoing. *Why, she's a true beauty,* Marcy thought—*no wonder the Chevalier is so attentive.*

Marcy found Herr Brandt invulnerable to conversation, for his accent in both English and French was so thick it was incomprehensible. So, apparently, was her German to him. Soon he gave up, and devoted himself to his stout wife on the other side, and to his food. The English couple was not yet on hand. The maiden cousins from Languedoc, Mlle. Laure and Mlle. Denise Costain, were fresh-faced, gentle spinsters of uncertain age, country souls openly enjoying to the hilt this taste of *la vie haute.*

After an iced dessert and a liqueur glass of green-gold Chartreuse, the ladies adjourned to the drawing room, leaving Duplessis and Herr Brandt to the cigars and brandy. Since the Austrian lady spoke neither French nor English, she retired, and Marcy and Dora found themselves dragooned into a card game with the two spinster ladies. The game turned out to be not bridge whist, but old-fashioned whist, with the trump determined by the turn of a card. Marcy was startled by the size of the stakes proposed by Mlle. Denise, as she produced an ample purse from some fold of her voluminous garb and laid it in front of herself.

It took only a few hands for Marcy to discover that the two gentle ladies were veritable tigresses at the whist table. They played partners, and won tricks with an insight that was almost psychic. In Dora Laughlin they had a formidable opponent, but Marcy had not played enough of late to shine in such fast company. To the delight of the Costain sisters when the game finally concluded at eleven-thirty, Marcy and Dora were down by some two hundred and fifty francs Marcy opened her purse and paid off. Mlle. Denise added the winnings to the contents of her bulging purse, and it disappeared into the folds of her dress.

"You play a very fine game." Marcy complimented the sisters, in French.

"Ah, at home we play often," Mlle. Laure said. "Almost every day, one whist club in the morning, you understand."

"And every afternoon, another club, " Mlle. Denise added.

Under her breath, Marcy said in English, "I can well believe it."

The next morning the Chevalier ordered up the victoria and took Marcy, Dora, and the Costain sisters on a long jaunt through the elegant countryside. The weather was fine, the fields and hills beautiful, and the company congenial. Marcy smiled as she saw Duplessis make sure Dora sat next to him, and Dora did not object.

The Chevalier was a student of local history. They visited battlefields, quaint churches, ancient cemeteries. At Noyon, they had a delightful luncheon in the garden of an inn overlooking the curving Somme. The air was sweet with the smell of flowers and bright with the song of birds.

Duplessis was an oenologist of some repute, as well as a connoisseur of wine. The vintage he ordered at Noyon proved delightful, and went so well that he ordered a second bottle.

"We have extensive vineyards at Chateau Orient," he explained. "But we press only enough grapes for our own use, and sell the rest in bulk to local wineries. I have pleaded with Mme. Demaret to set up a winery and promote a chateau brand, but she has not yet permitted it. A shame, for I feel I could do some fine things with our grapes."

The Costain sisters, nodding and smiling, applied themselves diligently to the ruby wine. So by the time the long drive and the long afternoon were over, they were asleep and snoring gently in the carriage seat. By dinnertime, they had completely recovered, at least enough to propose another

whist game. Though Marcy was pleasantly tired, and her skin was glowing from the summer sun, she agreed.

The sisters had won only a paltry fifty francs from Marcy when Dora pleaded a headache, breaking up the game. Mlle. Laure and Mlle. Denise were deeply disappointed, but eagerly recommended a fine remedy for headache they would be happy to supply, a recipe that had been handed down in the Costain family for many generations. If Mlle. Laughlin would permit—Dora refused gently and went upstairs to her room.

Marcy chose a book from the extensive library, and found pleasures in the essays of "that moderate man, Montaigne." The sisters quarreled in whispers over an interminable game of Russian Bank. The Austrian couple, bored with the quiet, and with some justification, put out over the absence of their hostess, went for a walk in the gardens and then retired. Finally Marcy, finding the words dancing like mice over the printed page, replaced Montaigne on his shelf and went up to her room.

Surprisingly, her aunt's bed was undisturbed, and Dora was nowhere in the suite. Somewhat anxious, Marcy walked down the carpeted hall, her steps soundless. From one room she heard resounding snores that penetrated even the solid oak of the door –Herr Brandt, no doubt, for he was a heavy, full-bodied man who ate more than well.

From farther along the hall Marcy heard the murmur of voices, where a small sitting room overlooked the rose garden. The house was warm with the residual heat of the sun, and through the open windows of the sitting room came the exotic perfume of roses, the pleasant spiciness of carnation and verbena. Not wanting to intrude, Marcy stepped back from the open door.

Though the conversation was low-voiced, Marcy recognized the timbre of Dora Laughlin's speech, and the deeper-pitched tones of Robert Duplessis. The exchange seemed most amiable, with an occasional chuckle from the Chevalier, and a merry laugh from Dora. Now Marcy heard a clink of glass on glass, and Duplessis asked, "A bit more brandy, my dear?"

"I do believe I will, Robert. Such exshellent brandy, ex-shellent, a fine bouquet, very mild. Robert, you may pour me 'nother glass."

Marcy suppressed a giggle, hearing the slight slur in her aunt's words. *I am afraid*, she thought, *that my dear spinster aunt is becoming a mite tipsy. More than that, she is now on first-name terms with her handsome Frenchman. There's*

plenty of life in the old dear yet, so more power to her. I hope she lives it up to the hilt. So smiling, Marcy tiptoed away, back to her solitary room.

The sound of a door closing wakened her. She did not know what time it was—very late, she was sure, for the house had cooled, and outside her windows the garden was silent except for the persistent cry of a night bird. Into her mind came a sparkle of description from *Huckleberry Finn*: "Everything was dead quiet, and it looked late, and *smelt* late."

Now the door of the bathroom closed, and there was the clunk and rumble of the toilet flushing, and finally the hiss and gurgle of the bidet. Minutes passed before she heard footsteps and the closing of her aunt's bedroom door. She hoped the poor dear wasn't ill. She listened, but when there was no further sound, she turned over and went to sleep.

When she woke again it was sunrise, with the light streaming through the window, and a whole orchestra of early birds caroling in the trees. She caught the scent of dew-wet grass, and could hear distant kitchen sounds as the preparation of breakfast began. It was the opening of her aunt's door which had wakened Marcy, for here was Dora, in nightgown and peignoir, standing in the doorway.

My God, she looks ten years younger! Positively rapturous, Marcy thought. She sat up in bed, pushing the pillows into a heap behind her. "Come in, Auntie," she said. "You're glowing like you were sixteen again. Tell Marcy all about it."

Dora sat down on the edge of the bed, staring intently at Marcy. She caught her niece's hand in hers. Almost inaudibly she whispered, "Marceline, I shouldn't be telling this to a soul except Father Hendryx, my confessor. But I must tell someone. Marcy, it was so wonderful!"

"What was, dear?" Marcy asked, refusing to guess.

"That—that act they call sinful, you know, with a man. I never dreamed that I would—that I could—"

"Settle down, Auntie, you've aroused my curiosity."

"Promise you won't be shocked? Marcy, darling, your aunt Dora is a wicked, abandoned woman. She—I—" She leaned over, her lips close to Marcy's ear. "I—I gave up my virginity last night."

"Aunt Dora, you didn't!" Marcy exclaimed. This spinster, this pious Catholic maiden aunt of hers, making such a statement! Yet Marcy was not entirely surprised. She had watched her aunt savoring her freedom from Claribel, sniffing

the free air of Europe. It was about time Dora kicked over the traces, Marcy thought. And Marcy could understand why Dora had to tell her. It was simply too exciting to keep to herself.

"To the Chevalier?" she asked.

"Yes. Marcy, what a man! He is so persuasive and gentle and so—so expert! I had been taught that there was something awful, something nasty about—about intercourse. But the way it was with me and Robert—Marcy, after my first terror passed and I responded to him, the world began to spin. It was so ecstatic, so beautiful, I could hardly stand it. And *then*, that ecstasy went higher and higher and heaven seemed to fall all around me in glistening golden shards. Then slowly a peace came over me more ineffable than anything I have ever known. Marcy, Marcy, what I've been missing! I never gave myself to poor Rodney Voden, you know, and I think I regret it now, though the dear man has been dead these five years. I wonder—would it have been like last night with Rodney?"

"I don't know, Auntie," Marcy said honestly.

"I shouldn't have asked. Of course a young girl like you wouldn't know. So innocent—Marcy, forgive me. I'm shameless even telling what happened to a dear child. But the experience was so wonderful I want to shout it to the world!"

"Robert might not like that," Marcy said drily, not adding any word that might disillusion Dora.

"That's right, I'm sure. You wouldn't betray my confidence, Marceline, I trust you." Then a stricken look came over Dora's face. "Marcy, do you suppose I'll—I'll have a baby?"

"It's possible, dear, but as you grow older the odds are against it," Marcy comforted. "But just in case—" she gave her aunt certain instructions.

Dora was mildly startled at Marcy's depth of knowledge in this matter, but easily put off with a story about a physiology course at M.I.T.

"So the next time—" Marcy said.

"There can't be a next time, since we are leaving Monday and Madame Demaret will arrive tomorrow, no, today. Robert told me he can't call his soul his own when Madame is here. 'I have to keep singing for my supper,' he said. So I suppose I'll just have to enshrine last night in memory," she said sadly.

"The Chevalier could immigrate to California," Marcy said

practically. "You two could get married, for I'm sure you have enough money for both of you."

Her aunt stared at her, red rising in her cheeks. "A lovely thought, dear, but Robert would never leave his homeland, his family, his work. But maybe, maybe—"

"I'm sure he loves France a great deal, perhaps too much. But something might arise to change his mind," Marcy said, not at all as sure as Dora was that Robert Duplessis would turn down such an arrangement, if it were properly presented. She said instead, "Now, Auntie, don't keep dwelling on this until you become conscience-stricken. It's done and over. Remember only that it was a tremendous experience. And it will be sufficient to confess it to your Father Hendryx one time only. He and God will forgive your sin."

Slowly an impish grin came over her aunt's face. "I hope so, because maybe some time, in the right circumstances, with the right man, I might—I might do it again!" she said. Giving her niece a quick kiss on the cheek, she fled to her own bedroom.

CHAPTER XXI

Later this Sunday morning, Marcy was enjoying a walk in the formal gardens of Chateau Orient. She wore a light summer frock of frost green, her red hair, uncovered in the summer sunlight, glowing like flame. Marcy hated hats, though she knew her habit of going bareheaded destroyed the fragility of her complexion each summer. The sun left her skin the gold of honey, strangely enough, since women of her coloring usually burned and peeled and burned again in strong sunlight.

She strolled casually along, enjoying the beauty and the scent of the flowers, and listening to the birdsongs rising sweetly in the still air. She was alone, for Robert Duplessis had ordered up the landaulet and taken Aunt Dora and the two Languedoc cousins to Mass in Compiègne. The Brandts were sleeping late, and Sir Hawley Harkenrode and his lady were at breakfast, having arrived this morning. She had not met them yet.

Marcy sat down on a bench by the stone basin of a small fountain. The droplets of spray formed a tiny rainbow in the sunlight as they drifted down the vagrant breeze. Nearby was an admirable Eros on a pedestal; the little god wore a marble sash which concealed his maleness, except from a certain small angle. She smiled, imagining the impish delight of the sculptor in providing this mild titillation for prim spinsters.

Marcy was content, soothed by a gentle euphoria. She enjoyed the clean soft air, the lulling tinkle of the fountain. She smiled again at the thought of her aunt and that amazing early-morning revelation. She was glad such an experience had come to Dora, who had been retreating into a shell under the aegis of Claribel, who treated Dora like a hopeless old maid. It was still surprising to Marcy that Dora had been able to throw off the inhibitions of family, social tradition, and religion to give herself, out of wedlock, to a man, even one as gentle and personable as Robert Duplessis. Yet she had, and it had given her a taste of a possible new life.

Marcy turned now to her own position. Jacques would

soon be here. She had little doubt that it was in his mind to renew the liaison begun on shipboard. She toyed with the idea. She was inclined to think that if Jacques played his cards right, he would find that she would not scream and fight, for she did like him very much. He was not Carlo, but—

Dear Carlo, she thought. Perhaps she could bribe Jacques, the opportunist, to help his cause. She was hot-blooded enough to want Jacques for his virility and his expertise. She felt like a bitch in heat. Was she—what was the slang phrase at Miss Spoff's?—a round heels? Not really, she decided. She was her own mistress, and as good as any man. If she wanted to use what God and nature gave her, she would. If she got hurt, it would be because she grew unwary. Twice men had made her life hell—it must not happen a third time.

Her introspection was broken by a rattle of carriage wheels. She saw that it was the victoria with the black horses, rather than the landaulet with the grays. It swept around the curving drive and stopped under the porte-cochere. Leaving her pleasant dell, Marcy walked to the house. Jacques was helping a tall woman in black from the carriage; when he saw Marcy his face lit with a wide smile.

"Marcy, so nice of you to come!" he exclaimed, taking her hand. "*Maman,* this is Mlle. Marceline Tarrant, of the city of San Francisco. She is a good friend of our Costain relatives there."

Mme. Demaret had been a beauty not many years ago, Marcy thought. Now she had a stern look, a cold, harsh look. Yet her fitted black dress, her severe hat, her frogged jacket had a somber chic. Marcy wished she would like her, but as Marcy's father would say, he'd "give six to five she doesn't."

"I am charmed, Mlle. Tarrant," Mme. Demaret said, though her eyes did not warm the words. "The Chevalier has taken care of you in my absence? I regret, but my absence was unavoidable."

At least he'd taken care of Dora, Marcy thought mischievously. Aloud she said in French, "Most admirably, Madame. I am so happy to meet you. Jacques sang your praises from New York to Southampton."

"You speak French well, with an American accent, of course," Madame said brusquely.

"Thank you. And I wish to thank you also for inviting my aunt and me to visit your lovely place."

"A shame your father couldn't come," Madame said.

"I'm sure he would have enjoyed it. But he was busy with business affairs, concerning the automobile industry."

Madame's eyebrows arched. "Yes. Jacques mentioned something. Costain *Frères*, you know, has some small involvement in such matters. Where are the others?"

"The Chevalier has taken my aunt, and your two cousins from Languedoc, to Mass in Compiègne," Marcy said. "The Brandts are around somewhere, and the Harkenrodes, who arrived this morning."

"Ah, yes, the English milord. I must find him. I have business with him which must be talked over. Jacques, as you know, Sir Hawley—" Those expressive eyebrows arched again.

"Oh, yes, I'll be happy to entertain this young lady, *Maman*. Mlle. Tarrant rides, so I thought we would go for a long jaunt in the country. Our horses are growing fat from lack of exercise. You won't need me?"

Madame shook her head, almost contemptuously, Marcy thought. "Sir Hawley and I will work out the preliminaries. Perhaps next week I will want you on the detail, the further steps. Come, Jacques, we must go in. We will see you at lunch, mademoiselle."

Jacques and his mother entered the house, the son holding his mother's arm solicitously. Marcy could see why he deferred to her.

Luncheon proved a rather dismal affair. Marcy worked out the various motivations—Madame's was business, for she concentrated on the florid, mustached Sir Hawley Harkenrode, to the neglect of Lady Harkenrode and the rest of the company. He had something *Maman* wanted, Marcy decided, and *Maman* was going after it tooth and nail. The Brandts too were business guests, but seemingly not of great importance. The Chevalier was engrossed in Dora Laughlin, and she in him. The two country cousins were obviously intimidated by Madame, for they ate quickly and in silence, their gaze fixed timidly on their plates.

Jacques paid court to Marcy, making frothy conversation. His efforts were marred, since half his attentions were devoted to overhearing something of what was passing between his mother and Sir Hawley at the far end of the table. Jacques was piqued at being excluded by Madame from what must be an important business matter. It was only when the meal was finished, and the company rose to go their separate ways, that Jacques turned his full attention to Marcy.

"My pretty one, you have your riding habit? Then hurry

and change into it. I'll meet you in the front hall in twenty minutes." He squeezed her hand in his left, the index finger of his right hand smoothed his narrow mustache. His eyes sparkled as if he and Marcy shared a secret.

"Fine, I'll be ready," she assured him. "But you go on ahead now. My aunt wants a word with me."

Robert Duplessis stood back discreetly as Dora spoke softly to her niece. "Robert is taking me for a drive along the Somme," she said. "We'll be gone all afternoon, to avoid interfering with the plans of—of *that woman*." Her dislike for her hostess was obvious.

"Fine. I'm going riding with Jacques," Marcy said. "We may not return until late."

"Have a good ride, dear," Dora said. Then she gave her niece a wicked wink. She whispered, "And the church didn't fall down on our heads this morning. God couldn't have been too angry with me." As Marcy chuckled, Dora slipped her hand under the elbow of the Chevalier and they strolled away.

Unlike Ashdown with its spate of motor cars, Chateau Orient was still a world of horses. Expecting this, Marcy had packed a modish riding habit of green corduroy. She slipped into blouse, skirt and jacket, struggled into high riding boots, and put on a perky bowler hat with a gay feather. She hurried downstairs, where Jacques was waiting in the hall, very handsome in flared whipcord riding breeches with doeskin patches at the knees, hacking coat and polished boots much like Marcy's. A billed huntsman's cap covered his curly hair. *My God, but he's beautiful,* Marcy thought, and found her criticisms ebbing away.

She came close to him, letting the scent of her exotic Paris perfume drift to his nostrils as she smiled. It triggered the effect she wanted, for he glanced around the hall, saw that no one was in sight, and gathered Marcy into his arms. She tipped her face up. His kiss was burning, passionate; hers was ardent. He released her reluctantly, and hand in hand, they went out the garden doors, to take the curving path to the capacious stables.

Jacques asked, "You ride well? You're not afraid of a mount with a bit of spirit?"

"No, though it's some time since I've ridden," she told him. She was remembering the dashes over the Marin County hills on her own pony, a hammerheaded cayuse with a mind of his own. She had been young enough then to wear boy's overalls and ride astride without criticism, though she

wouldn't have cared if people had talked. Later of course, she had to ride sidesaddle. She hadn't liked it, but it gave her a chance to ride.

"You and *Chat Noir* will get along fine, then," Jacques said. "Though you'll find you need a firm hand with her. My horse, *Mon Général*, can be a mean devil, but he's a fine jumper wth plenty of bottom. Ah, I see they have our mounts ready."

Marcy took Black Cat's reins from the groom, patting the mare and speaking softly to her. As Jacques approached, the General snorted and reared, almost lifting his groom off the ground. Jacques, unperturbed, subdued the big sorrel with his sure strong hands.

Having made friends with Black Cat, Marcy mounted from a portable step, with a boost from Jacques. She hooked her knee around the horn of the sidesaddle and found the stirrup with her boot. She smoothed down her long riding skirt and took the reins from the groom. Jacques swung into the saddle, convinced the General who was boss, and led the way at a smart trot through the gate and down a lane into the woods.

The General wanted to run, so when they were beyond the main grounds, Jacques spurred the big horse into a gallop along the forest path. Marcy touched Black Cat with her borrowed riding crop, and the mare responded beautifully, her gait smooth and controlled. A darned good thing, Marcy thought, for a sidesaddle was a precarious perch at best, and even dangerous on a badly gaited mount.

The horses ran off their first excess of vitality and settled into a more sedate trot. Side by side, Marcy and Jacques rode along the lovely lanes, past quaint farmhouses, the barns and gardens well-kept, the pastures a picture with the cattle and sheep grazing on the green sward. All Demaret land, Jacques informed Marcy, worked by tenant farmers.

Now they passed walled fields where great bunches of grapes hung from row upon row of vines, the fruit turning color now under the summer sun. "Excellent grapes. We harvest a great many tons. But we do not have a winery of our own as most chateaux do. We sell our crop to other wineries. The Chevalier is an oenologist of some repute, and he would like to set up our own winery. However, making a superior French wine is a complicated, touchy business, and *Maman* is impatient with such finicky details—too much risk, she says. So she has put her foot down on the winery business. And when *Maman* puts her foot down—"

He looked at Marcy with a rueful smile. "Why, then the earth shakes!"

They rode on, Marcy enjoying the perfect weather, the fine mare under her, and the company of Jacques. Now, away from the chateau, he was in a sunny mood, a charming companion, witty, well-informed. Since Marcy wanted to improve her fairly fluent French, their conversation was in that tongue, which enabled Jacques to be more expansive than in English.

They had ridden some fifteen miles, latterly at a leisurely pace, and the afternoon was waning. Topping a hill was a building in an attractive setting, its whitewashed walls shining clean in the slanting sunlight. Raising his arm, Jacques pointed toward it.

"I hope you are hungry, dear Marcy," he said. "Ahead is *l'auberge* Livret, where we should have an excellent dinner awaiting us. M. Livret and his stout wife are the most marvelous of cooks, and they cellar the finest wines in northern France."

"You lay your plans with care, Jacques," Marcy said.

He gave her an odd look. "One must plan ahead to achieve one's aims. I'm sure you will enjoy dining here, Marcy. If *l'auberge* Livret were on a well-traveled highway, it would be overwhelmed by custom, but since it is not, the favored few must seek it out to high reward. The Livrets like it that way, and so will you."

The inn proved most charming. After the stable boys had led away the horses, Jacques and Marcy went inside to a spotless dining room. It was evident that Marcy and Jacques were expected, and by the rather smug expression on the face of Jacques, Marcy guessed that he had arranged the meal by letter some days before.

On this lovely day they were the only patrons, so they had the full attention of the stout chef, M. Livret, and his stout, red-cheeked wife, Mme. Claudine. The ride, the fresh air, and the inn itself made Marcy ravenously hungry, and the odors wafting from the kitchen literally made her mouth water.

Madame Claudine brought them first a *soupe à la bonne femme*, delicately flavored with leek. Next came *coquille St. Jacques crème gratin* (in honor of his saint, Jacques explained). This was accompanied by a tart dry Semillon, cool from the cellar.

Mme. Claudine presented each dish with flair and flourish, and with the knack of the perfect waitress, a course would arrive at the table just as the prior course would finish. Now

she brought the main course, *filet de boeuf de Talleyrand*, which Marcy learned was select beef marinated and roasted in Madeira wine, with macaroni and truffles Julienne and a demi-*glacé* sauce. It was set off by a *Chateauneuf du Pape*, dry, ruby red, with a delightful bouquet.

Marcy and Jacques ate leisurely, finding the fine food delicate and sensuous in flavor. Just as they finished the last delicious morsel of the main course, Madame appeared with dessert, placing it in front of them with an extra flourish. Then she popped the cork from a bottle and poured a generous amount over the orange ice that partially covered the tiny wild strawberries in the two bowls.

"*Fraises de bois au champagne*, as you ordered, m'sieu," Mme. Livret announced proudly. "The little berries do not come easily at this time of year."

Though she felt stuffed, Marcy could not resist the wild strawberries. She ended by spooning out the last delectable drop of juice from her bowl. "You are a man of your word, Jacques," she said. "You remembered what I said on the *Lucania*. I never had such a delicious meal in my life."

Mme. Livret brought snifters of Napoleon brandy, slices of Brie, and took away the empty bowls. When she had gone, Jacques said, "Your pleasure is my reward." Reaching over, he touched his brandy glass to hers. He said softly, "Here's health to the two of us. Remember, dear Marcy, a toast we made in brandy once before?"

"I could never forget," Marcy said. She wished she didn't feel so relaxed, for she wanted her mind sharply acute. The food, the wine, the presence of this handsome man were all working to dilute her concentration. *Better get to it, Marcy,* she told herself.

Leaning forward, she said, "Jacques, I know it is your mother's rule not to talk business on Sunday, though I have seen that she does not always abide by that herself. I will be quick about it, though it is business in a way."

"Go ahead as you wish, my dear," Jacques said, lighting a long slim cigar. He blew a cloud of aromatic smoke toward the beamed ceiling, and smiled at her.

"As we rode here, I told you something of my stay at Ashdown, and the automobile race to Peterborough. I rode in the race with an Italian inventor, Count Ferroni. I found his machine, which he calls the Vinca, remarkable, ahead of its time. The poor man wants to get it into production in his native Novara, but he lacks the capital for a factory. I remembered hearing you say Costain *Frères* were making

quite substantial investments in the motor car field, and your mother confirmed that this morning. I suggested to Count Ferroni that I would put in a word to you to recommend lending him the sum he will need."

He looked at her through the blue haze of cigar smoke, his eyes narrowed. "This Ferroni, is he of special interest to you?" he asked.

"No, no, just an acquaintance," she lied. "He seems very competent, and his car has some excellent features. Daddy and I are thinking of getting the American dealership for it. So for several reasons I would like to play the good Samaritan for Carlo."

"Why, I might agree to look into Ferroni's case, if—ah, certain conditions were met," he said slowly.

"By Carlo, or by me?" Marcy asked bluntly.

"By you, since I don't know this Italian."

"A *quid pro quo*, eh? We don't need that, Jacques. This has no bearing on my fondness for you, nor the fact that I will never forget that heavenly night on shipboard. With that memory I was hoping—Jacques, don't you see that I am trying to look less than brazen? That I am trying to save face?"

"So the ardent Italian means nothing to you?" he asked. "You seem quite concerned about him."

"Jacques, you can't be jealous, not after the *Lucania*."

Mollified, he said, "I promise then to look into the matter of your Italian. Now let's forget him." He discarded his cigar and took both her hands in his. "Darling Marcy, I am hungry for you, too. Why, your pulse is beating like a tom-tom. Are the preliminaries over?"

She met his gaze squarely. "The preliminaries are over. Oh, Jacques, if there were only a place—"

"There is," he said. With a triumphant gesture he plucked a key from his jacket pocket and held it up. "This fits the lock on a most comfortable little room upstairs. The inn has no other guests, and I assure you that M. and Mme. Livret are the most discreet couple in all of France."

She stood up, knowing that her cheeks were flaming. She kissed him fiercely. Then she buried her face against his jacket, and asked in a muffled voice, "Where are the stairs?"

CHAPTER XXII

From far ahead, Marcy heard the whistle of the locomotive as the train rushed through a small village. It was the ridiculous "hoot-hoot" of a European engine, not like the long melodious wail of the chime whistle, which marked an American limited. And those little freight cars they called "goods vans" here—what a contrast with the long string of boxcars and tankers strung out behind a mighty Pacific engine, thundering across mountain and prairie.

Her father, his eyes closed, shifted position again, though the seats of their first-class compartment were quite comfortable. *His leg is hurting him again, poor dear,* Marcy thought. In the seat across Dora Laughlin was dozing too, a faint smile on her pretty face. Marcy mused, *Dreaming of the Chevalier?*

She let her own thoughts turn back to that Sunday evening three days before. The interlude at *l'auberge* Livret had not been a disappointment. Jacques had proven loving and gentle and expert.

Nonetheless, somehow the occasion hadn't seemed as satisfying as the lovemaking at sea. A little too contrived, Marcy thought, too neatly arranged. The lovely inn, without patrons except for themselves, the dinner so beautifully served, the ready key to the upstairs bedroom. . . . She had the feeling this was not the first time Jacques had employed the facilities of *l'auberge* Livret. Nor would it be the last.

She knew now that she was not in love with Jacques Demaret. *If I were,* she thought, *why would thoughts of Carlo Ferroni have intruded during that most overwhelming of all acts?*

Jacques's planning had shown itself once more when the Demaret carriage had appeared almost miraculously at the inn at the exact right twilight moment, with an extra groom to bring the horses home.

The crowning touch to her disillusionment came as they rode comfortably home in the well-sprung landaulet, Jacques's arm around her shoulders. He had made a suggestion that she remain in Paris, where he had a cozy little apartment. He would show her Montmartre, and Versailles, and all the

glories of Paris. Later they might travel to the Côte d'Azure, and Cannes.

Gently, firmly, she had declined, pleading family matters, urgent business in America. He seemed rather annoyed that she was less than eager to assume the status of a mistress, or, she thought, an unpaid prostitute. It made her feel cheap that he would suggest it, after the joy of their lovemaking at the inn.

The temper that went with her red hair began rising, but she controlled it, using all the tact at her command to turn him down gently. She was sure that otherwise she would undo progress she had made in preparing the way for the loan to Carlo. Feeling as she did about Carlo Ferroni, she implied to Jacques that she might change her mind another day, another trip.

Though he hadn't even intimated a possibility of marriage, Marcy was sure she would have refused that as well. When *Maman* heard of such a thing, she would have put her foot down, and the world of Jacques would have shaken. No doubt by now *Maman* had obtained by cable from the San Francisco Costains the upstart ancestry and the very moderate (by *Maman's* standards) wealth of the Tarrants.

Not that Marcy had any deep regrets for sleeping with Jacques. It had been an exciting and fulfilling game, she reflected. But now that it was over, it seemed an empty experience with an empty man. She'd had bad luck with Costains, Marcy thought. Best to steer wide of them from now on, if she could.

Her ire rose again as she thought of the final snub for the Tarrants. She supposed Jacques was piqued, his mother disdainful, but neither of them bothered to see the Tarrants off on their Monday morning train to Paris. Only the gallant Chevalier was courteous enough to ride in the victoria with them to the Compiègne station and had bid them farewell, with an especially courtly and ardent goodbye to Dora.

Marcy's moody thoughts were interrupted by the slowing of the train, and the *chef-de-train* opening the compartment door to say they were at the German border and that passengers must go through customs and change trains.

The German train proved clean and swift. They detrained at Gotha, a pleasant city just west of the Thuringian mountains. Their rooms at a small hotel were excellent, though the bedsteads were piled deep with stifling feather beds, even in summer. Marcy and her father had demurred at Prince Rupert's invitation to stay at his ancient *schloss* just

outside the town. Tom Tarrant wanted freedom for his own observations, Dora wanted to shop for porcelain and carved wood, and Marcy agreed that it would be best to be under no obligation to a man with whom they had business dealings.

Marcy and her aunt found the shops and the sights of the quaint, bustling German city intriguing, though Tom Tarrant remained in the hotel, his bad leg giving him considerable pain. " 'Twas those cobblestones in Paris that did me in," he told Marcy. "I learned long since that a man sees little from a hansom cab, so I did a deal of walking, more than I should have. 'Twill pass, 'twill pass—I hope."

They were to have dinner with Prince Rupert and Princess Lilli that evening. They came down to find a handsome green Saxon-Benz touring car waiting for them. Tom Tarrant, resplendent in evening dress, got in beside the ladies, and the footman closed the car door.

As the chauffeur drove away from the hotel, Tom Tarrant said, "Glory be, but you two look scrumptious tonight."

"We put on our Sunday-go-to-meetin' best, since we're visiting royalty," Marcy said.

Tonight she wore a sweeping dress of black satin with a broad white collar. Her hair was in a high coiffure. Dora, beautiful and ladylike, wore a burgundy velvet that fit tightly, accentuating her trim figure. They both wore long white gloves with innumerable pearl buttons.

At the *schloss*, they were greeted warmly by Prince Rupert and Princess Lilli. The prince was just as handsome as Marcy remembered him, and the princess as lovely and gracious.

"So pleased you could all come," the princess said in heavily accented English. She switched to German. "You enjoyed the ride here? Very scenic in this part of Germany. Come along, dinner will be served soon. We have only a small group, people who are interested in the automobile."

"Have you found the secret of keeping the prince out of grease and oil, which ruin his shirts?" Marcy asked in German.

Princess Lilli laughed. "As he did in San Francisco? No, he still does so. A failing incurable, I'm afraid."

The *schloss* was very old. It had thick stone walls, vaulted ceilings, and great arched windows. Marcy learned that in modern times the family had reconstructed much of the interior of the castle to make it livable, with central heating, plumbing and such non-medieval comforts. On this summer evening the interior was pleasantly cool. Marcy could guess how chill and uncomfortable it must have been in ancient

winters. She supposed that royalty had dressed in heavy clothing and stayed as close as they could to roaring fireplaces.

The wealth here was evident in the fine oil paintings on the walls, the heavy tapestries, the statues and *objets-de-virtu*. Lovely old carpets filled the large rooms; the furniture was a trifle ponderous for Marcy's taste. Elaborate crystal chandeliers were no longer lit by a myriad of candles, but by electric bulbs. Princess Lilli was explaining the stories of some of the paintings when the butler announced that dinner was served.

There were twenty people at dinner in the long, severe dining room. The table was striking with crystal, silver, and fine German porcelain, all on thick snowy linen. Each piece seemed to be emblazoned with the royal crest of Saxe-Coburg. The food was excellent, though a trifle heavy in the German manner. The German wines, however, were beyond compare.

Marcy found herself next to Baron Schiller, the prince's uncle. However, he devoted himself to her Aunt Dora, on his far side, maintaining a sprightly conversation in heavily accented English. This enabled Marcy to give full attention to her acquaintance on the other side, Max Landstaff, a rather blocky, blond young man. He was the superintendent of Prince Rupert's Saxon-Benz factory. She learned that Landstaff was a graduate engineer, enthusiastic about his work, and sure that the Saxon-Benz car produced in his factory was the finest car in the world.

As the meal neared an end, and a dessert of blanc-mange was being served, Landstaff said, "You rode in Prince Rupert's tourer. What do you think of our machine?"

"Very fine workmanship," Marcy said. "By ear only, I would say it needs more power. I saw the chauffeur downshift on the grade up to the *schloss*. That hill is not too steep."

She was afraid she might have offended him. Instead he turned toward her and said eagerly, "Exactly what I have been telling the boss! In a road race our car would eat dust, and the road race is the final testing ground for the automobile."

"Do you plan a larger engine, Herr Landstaff?" Marcy asked. "It isn't a secret that my father and I are here to look into taking on the West Coast agency for your car. I ask about the engine because we have many hills. We would need a more powerful car than your present model."

"But we will have! We will have!" Landstaff exclaimed. "Our design is in the final stage; we have our prototype on

the testing block. You will understand we have broken away from the concept of Herr Benz, and I—we will develop more than forty horsepower in our engine."

"That would do it," Marcy said. "I'm anxious to see it. Will you name it the Landstaff engine?"

Landstaff shook his head humbly. "No. Though much of it came from my brain and my drafting board, who is Max Landstaff? The public, they know Carl Benz, they know Rudolph Diesel. They have the prestige." He grinned with sudden humor. "Miss Tarrant, who would buy a car called the Saxon-Landstaff?"

The next day it was Max Landstaff who accompanied Marcy on a tour of the Saxon-Benz factory. Prince Rupert was closeted in the plant office with Tom Tarrant, to talk business. Marcy was pleased with that, for her father had been limping badly, because his leg was giving him pain.

Landstaff pointed out the various production steps, the product control testing, the way the many components were brought from the warehouses to be assembled into the complete car. "A factory very neat, very clean, eh?" Landstaff commented. "No expense spared on machinery, the prince insisted on the very best. Much is driven by electricity. Our men, they are the best of workmen. We have drawn machinists and metalworkers from as far away as the Kiel shipyards."

"And what will your annual output be?" Marcy asked.

"Now three cars a month. Soon five—sixty cars a year."

Marcy shook her head. She said bluntly, "You can't make any money on that small production. Ten times sixty, maybe."

He stared at her with new respect. "Have you been talking to our accountants?"

She laughed. "Herr Landstaff, my father and I are in the automobile business. I have had engineering training. We have studied every angle of the business. Our conclusion is that the automobile cannot exist as a rich man's toy. It must be produced so cheaply that it can be bought by the man in the street. When people can buy an automobile of their own, then the industry will prosper, and not before."

"I agree. But we have not yet found a way to increase production and still keep costs down. We refuse to sacrifice quality."

"You should visit some of the American factories. There is a man named Henry Ford. . . . Come, Herr Landstaff, I want to see your new engine of forty horsepower."

Tom Tarrant came from the plant office to join Marcy,

Prince Rupert beside him. Both men were smiling. Tarrant said, "Marcy, good news. You and I are the agents for the Saxon-Benz automobile on the West Coast of the U.S."

"Excellent," Marcy said. "Prince Rupert, you won't regret it, I assure you." They shook hands all around, the prince and Herr Landstaff beaming, Tom Tarrant and Marcy beaming. But Tom Tarrant leaned heavily on Marcy's shoulder as he limped to the waiting motor car.

Dora went with Princess Lilli on an all-day drive in the country. Though Marcy would have liked to go, by this time Tom Tarrant was confined to his room, so she begged off. Dora offered to stay as well, but Marcy sent her on her way.

The well-padded German doctor came, recommended by the hotel. He tested and poked and prodded the aching frame of Tom Tarrant. Tarrant bore it manfully. When the doctor put his stethoscope and his other equipment back in his bag, he said in German, "Nothing seems to be fundamentally wrong, Frl. Tarrant. An old injury, aggravated by too much walking, perhaps a chill. Very painful, of course. I could give him an injection."

"He wouldn't stand still for that," Marcy said. "What other course could you recommend?"

"You have time? Then a fortnight at one of our spas, taking the mineral waters, bathing daily in the hot pools. Baden-Baden, perhaps, they have fine facilities."

After the doctor was gone, Marcy gave her father the verdict.

"A good boiling-out might do me a world of good," Tom Tarrant said. "But we'd lose two weeks from our schedule. It would wipe out any trip to Italy, and your friend Count Ferroni will be disappointed. But we must get back to the States at the time we planned."

"I know, Daddy," Marcy said. "No matter, your health comes first. You haven't been quite yourself since you caught that cold in Ireland."

"Go ahead and make the arrangements for Baden-Baden, then." Tarrant acquiesced. "Better book passage home on a North German Lloyd liner. The *Kronprinz Wilhelm* is brand new. Try to book us on her. They say she's fast and comfortable. If you run into any snags, Prince Rupert can probably pull a few strings for you."

Though the prince and princess were regretful that the Tarrants must leave, the prince did pull some strings to get them fine accommodations at Baden, and a first-class suite

and stateroom on the *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, which by great good fortune was sailing from Hamburg just a few days after the end of Tom Tarrant's regimen of treatment.

Prince Rupert and Princess Lilli took them to the station in the Saxon-Benz. The prince again said how pleased he was with their new business connection. He and the princess seemed genuinely sorry that they must leave Gotha so soon. A most gracious and friendly couple, Marcy thought as the Tarrants and Dora boarded the train. Her opinion was confirmed by the flowers and fruit the prince had sent to grace their compartment.

The great spa at Baden-Baden was a national institution. The big hotels, the dozens of ornate bathhouses, all provided facilities to drink the ill-smelling water, to bathe in it, to wade in it, have it poured over one's head. Baden was a mecca for the overweight burgher and the obese *hausfrau*. Under its strict regimen (no sausage, potatoes, beer, or schnapps), they could not fail to be lighter and feel better at the end of their treatment. They could go home then, Marcy thought with a chuckle, to get fat all over again.

With Irish stubbornness, Tom Tarrant was apt to follow a determined course without veering. Thus, he followed the orders of the doctors meticulously, swallowed the evil-tasting water by the gallon, and soaked in the hot pools until he was as parboiled as a Virginia ham. It brought results. By the end of the first week his leg was less painful, his limp was slighter, and the last trace of his Irish coryza had disappeared. He told Marcy he was tempted to cut short his stay, but as long as it had done him so much good, he might as well stick it out.

There was no doubt that life at the spa was relaxing. Marcy and Dora took the baths and drank the water, though on a less extensive scale than Tom Tarrant's regimen. In this enclave of healing, the cares and pressures of the world did not intrude. Without reading the newspapers, Marcy felt insulated from the latest wars and rumors of wars. She enjoyed this artificial realm. Home and college and Jacques Demaret and even San Francisco seemed so far away. She did find her thoughts turning often to Carlo Ferroni. She had sent him a telegram of regret that they could not visit Novara, when their plans were changed; she hoped he would understand. She did not mention the possibility of a loan from Costain *Frères*. It would be cruel to raise Carlo's hopes, only to have them dashed by a refusal by *Maman*, or by Jacques himself.

The lazy days passed easily at Baden. Its health industry was organized with German efficiency. No angle had been overlooked to separate the visitor from his marks, francs, or dollars. Baden's many shops varied from the shoddy to the de luxe. Tours and entertainments were provided, a theater with a good stock company, a small opera house provided passable performances, and on occasion a symphonic orchestra. By day there was riding and boating, and in the afternoons, band concerts in the park. So for Marcy and Dora the time passed pleasantly enough.

Marcy had always kept herself in good physical shape, so in the ladies' pools she looked slim and sylphlike among the buxom German matrons. She endured faithfully her daily massage at the hands of strapping masseuses, who slapped and kneaded and pounded her naked body until she was glowing from heel to head with stimulated circulation. Her good health became radiant. She felt ready to cope with any situation.

Dora Laughlin had led a more sedentary life, so she did not have the tone in muscles grown rather lax and soft. But she had the same Irish stubbornness as her brother-in-law, and she endured the baths and the exercise and the massage. With her the results were even more marked than with Marcy. She stood straighter, her belly flattened, her hips and buttocks slimmed down. An incipient sag of her fine bosom was reversed.

"Why, I feel like a young girl!" she said to Marcy near the end of their stay.

"And darned if you don't look like one, Auntie," Marcy said. "If the Chevalier could see you now—"

"Since I am lying on a massage table, stark naked except for a skimpy towel, that gentleman would probably bow, say '*Excusez-moi*,' and run for the door," Dora said tartly, though Marcy was sure her aunt was blushing all over at the not unpleasant thought. "Marcy, I wonder if I will ever see that fascinating man again."

Marcy groaned as the amazon in the white uniform slapped her on the buttocks with a skilled and stinging hand. "Of course you'll see him, Auntie," she said. "I'll wager the day will come when Robert will have had enough of Madame's harsh treatment and he'll leave Chateau Orient."

"Do you think he'd come to America?" Dora asked dreamily. Then it was her turn to grunt as her masseuse dug strong fingers into Dora's shoulders. Gasping, Dora said, "Marcy, what if I offered his ship passage and train fare?"

Marcy was silent while the amazon worked on the thigh muscles with implacable hands. The woman gave her a final slap on the bottom, and Marcy sat up, clutching the towel against her nudity. She said, "Robert Duplessis is a proud man, Auntie dear. But pride has its limits. Keep writing him. You'll be able to tell from the tone of his answers when his situation is becoming desperate. Then make your offer. Couch it in terms of a loan, perhaps."

"That might work," Dora said. "With his appearance, and his skills, I'm sure we could find a suitable place for him. Estate manager, or something similar. Not for the American Costains, of course." She shuddered. "Working for Cleopatra Costain would be worse than working for Madame Demaret." Her masseuse gave her the final slap and she slid down from the table. With a new-found pride in her appearance, without self-consciousness, she let the towel drop away from her naked body as she reached for her clothing. "The Costains would misuse Robert selfishly, by their reputation at home."

Why didn't you tell me that two years ago, dear Auntie? Marcy thought regretfully. Then she shook her head. *I would never have believed her then, not about Paul. How gauche I was!* The world, she knew, had opened her eyes since, though its lessons hadn't been easy ones.

As they boarded the train for Hamburg at Baden-Baden, Marcy was delighted at the improvement in her father, wrought by the stay at the spa. She thought he looked better than he had in years, his color good, his complexion clear, his stocky body trim and solid. With better health, his mental attitude was improved. He had regained his enthusiasm for Tarrant Motors, and new plans bubbled and seethed in his mind.

As the train sped north, Marcy and her father had long talks about the development of the firm. Marcy found the rapport between them a fine and rewarding thing. They had always been close, now they seemed closer than ever. *There are a few secrets Daddy doesn't know,* Marcy thought. *Nor ever, please God, will he. Yet even if I confessed them to him, I'm sure he'd understand and forgive.*

Dora too was changed. The aging spinster who had boarded the *Lucania* nearly three months before was a new woman, both physically and mentally. Now she had pride and confidence in herself, and Marcy guessed that though the spa at Baden had helped, the real cause was Robert Duplessis, the Chevalier Moreau. He had helped her learn how to open the long vistas of a woman's life. The man

should come to California, Marcy thought, and she vowed to pull any strings she could to get him there.

The summer had passed so quickly for Marcy that when they boarded the *Kronprinz Wilhelm* she was startled to realize it was already September. Those honeyed days of summer had fled past her on wings of light. So many things had happened.

It was indeed September for the *Kronprinz Wilhelm.* The handsome new German ship met an Atlantic storm of gale violence. The liner shuddered and lunged at the impact of great white-capped combers. Under low hanging banks of gray clouds, the ship was lashed by flying scud, which rattled against windows and porthole glass. Social life was impossible, for it became a task to get from stateroom to dining saloon and back. Dining itself was arduous, with food and tableware threatening to end up on one's lap with the lurch and roll of the ship.

Many passengers were seasick, and even Marcy, good sailor that she was, felt a bit queasy at times. The real surprise was Dora Laughlin, who instead of taking to her berth, was up and about, able to take meals with Marcy and Tom Tarrant.

"I just made up my mind that the stewardess on the *Lucania* was right," Dora said with an air of pride. "She insisted *mal de mer* was mainly a state of mind. So I keep telling myself I am *not* going to be sick, and so far that has worked quite well."

" 'Tis true that when a Laughlin or a Tarrant makes up her mind, nothing can stand before her," Tom Tarrant said.

"Like Madame Demaret, eh?" Dora asked. "The Irish aren't the only nationality set in its ways, Thomas."

They were nearly across the Atlantic when the ship finally put the last of the storm behind her and broke into brilliant sunshine under blue skies. The night of the captain's dinner was blessedly calm, and the Tarrants and Dora attended with nearly all the other first-class passengers. The occasion was pleasant enough, but without a Jacques Demaret, without a circle of bright mercurial people, it had few charms for Marcy.

After the soprano singing German *lieder*, the quite adequate magician, and a yodeler in lederhosen who went on interminably, Marcy made her excuses and retired to her cabin. There in robe and slippers she honed her German with a translation of *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, borrowed from the ship's

library. *For the good of my soul,* Marcy thought, as she struggled with the tortuous German phrasing, *and for my past sins.* Then she looked up and smiled as a new thought intruded, *Lord be praised, it's going to be so good to be home again!*

CHAPTER XXIII

For the first week or two back in Boston, Marcy missed her father and Dora terribly. Then the heavy course load she was carrying at M.I.T. overwhelmed her, and she had no time to be lonesome. One of her professors was intrigued by her new-found knowledge of the automobile world of Europe, and advised that she do a monograph on it for credit. This project occupied a good deal of the free time she had.

Things went more easily than she expected this autumn, even with her heavy schedule. She found she was able to indulge in a free evening, and a Sunday or even a weekend now and again. With deep sadness, and something of a feeling of treachery, she knew the reason: she no longer had to carry Barry Olden.

At the Shamrock Garage on Boylston Street, John O'Brien produced her Panhard runabout, furbished and tuned and filled with gasoline. "We guessed you'd soon be in for her," O'Brien said. "How does she look with her new tires?"

"Beautiful, John," she said. "How much for the tires?"

"Not a thin dime, though they are French Michelins, supposed to be the best in the world. It should be many a weary mile before you suffer a flat tire."

"That's wonderful of you, John. But why?"

"Because with this little beauty for a demonstrator, we sold two runabouts like her, and a touring model. So we've fixed her up with brand-new tires, and given her a tune-up, as a mark of the gratitude of the Shamrock Garage."

Marcy found it good to get behind the wheel again. On a free Sunday she called Patsy Laughlin and invited her to go for a ride in the country. "I'll tell you all about my trip to Europe, Pat," she promised. "And buy you lunch besides."

"Oh, Marce, how scrumptious! I've been dying to hear all about your travels," her cousin said. "And I've got scads to tell you about San Francisco."

At Mrs. Ferguson's boarding house, Patsy came flying down the steps and into the car. She gave Marcy a great hug and kiss. "Marce, it's so great to see you," she cried as Marcy pulled away from the curb. "I've been so *damnably* lonesome

since I came here. The other girls living here with Mrs. Ferguson go to the Conservatory too, but I'm the only art student. So all I hear is music, music, music until my very ears hurt."

"They never talk about men?" Marcy asked, turning her car north.

"Well, now and then," Patsy admitted with a grin. "But since I don't have a beau, they're so *superior* when they talk to me."

"You could find a beau, Pat, a pretty thing like you."

"I suppose, if I made the effort. But I think I left my heart in San Francisco," Patsy said. Marcy waited for her cousin to elaborate, but Patsy said no more.

"I thought we'd go to Gloucester for a seafood dinner," Marcy said. "Patsy, you're looking more beautiful than ever."

"Marce, you say the nicest things," Patsy said, dimpling. "But really, I'm half as fat as a pig. I've got to take some of it off. You know how us Laughlins like food, so it won't be easy. If I hadn't lost some sleep and done a lot of riding in the summer, I'd look like a hippopotamus."

"Sounds as if you had a good time. The family is well, I hope."

"All fine. Dad's bank is going great guns. Mamma is mixed up in forty-'leven clubs and organizations, and president of half of them. That was all right with me; my pal Lisa Gouch and I were free as the wind. We had a marvelous summer, doing just as we pleased. The boys were home from college, Roger Trilling and George McGeorge and—oh, golly, a slew of others. The weather was good, we went swimming and sailing and riding, and cycling and picnics and I don't know what all. And eat—Marce, we ate all the time. I nearly foundered myself."

"Sounds like real fun," Marcy said.

"It was, just delish. It would take me a week to give you chapter and verse on all of it, but one day I will. But what about your trip? Was it really great?"

Knowing Patsy's penchant for talking, Marcy was quite selective in her account of her adventures. She was expansive about the hospitality at Ashdown and Chateau Orient and the *schloss* at Gotha, but she soft-pedaled the depth of her friendship with Jacques Demaret and Carlo Ferroni.

"Golly, Marce, real live lords and princes and counts, in real chateaus and mansions!" Patsy cried. "I'm going to start right now talking Mamma into a trip like that next year. Unless—" she stopped, looking pensive.

"Unless what, Pat?" Marcy asked.

But her cousin merely shook her head. "Oh, nothing," she said.

Marcy drove on through Saugus, past West Peabody, and across the Ipswich at Danvers. Patsy was drinking in the account of the wonders of Europe, when Marcy said "Did I mention that Jacques Demaret is a power in Costain *Frères*, and a cousin of the San Francisco Costains?"

"A cousin of Paul's? Why, Paul never said—" She broke off, then asked, "Does he look like Paul, Marcy?"

"Very much, same coloring, same neat little mustache, same terrific charm, same lofty manner," Marcy said. "Though our host at Chateau Orient was a shirt-tail relative, Robert Duplessis, Chevalier Moreau. A very fine gentleman. Aunt Dora was much taken with him."

Marcy slowed, stepping hard on the brake pedal, for beside the road at the outskirts of Manchester sat a helmeted policeman on a bicycle. Marcy smiled at the man as she drove on at a sedate ten miles an hour.

In Gloucester they ate oysters on the half-shell, and clam chowder. They cracked Maine lobster and dipped the meat in drawn butter. The meal ended with blueberry pie smothered in thick cream. An American meal, Marcy thought, thinking of tiny wild strawberries savored at a French country inn, on another Sunday that now seemed so long, long ago.

Marcy drove home by a different route, leisurely. The woods were beginning to turn to gold and flame, and it came to Marcy once again that there is nothing quite so strikingly beautiful as New England in autumn.

"Oh, stop, Marcy! I must catch this," Patsy said.

Marcy pulled up at the roadside. From her voluminous purse, Patsy took sketch pad and pencil. With quick sure strokes she blocked in woods and trees and sky. She added a distant farmhouse, sketched in the cows grazing in the meadow, all done with skill and confidence.

Surprised, Marcy decided perhaps Claribel was right about Patsy's talent. "You'll do an oil from this sketch?" she asked as Patsy put her materials and the sketch away. "Pat, you're very good. Sell me that painting when you finish it. I'll love it."

"I'll give it to you," Patsy said. She frowned. "I like to do things like this, but a lot of what I get at the Conservatory is a ghastly bore. I suppose, though, there's more to painting than making a picture of red cows in a brown field."

"What would you sooner do?" Marcy asked.

"Oh, travel, meet people like you did, see the world, have a few romantic attachments, then get married to a handsome husband, have some handsome children, give parties—"

What had gotten into the kid? Marcy wondered. Probably just reaction from a carefree, exciting summer. Something Patsy had said—Marcy was tempted to ask about Paul Costain. Surely her cousin would have all the news about "the boy next door." But since Patsy unaccountably did not volunteer any information, Marcy was too proud to ask.

She changed the subject. "Pat, Kitti Carnesi is back from Europe, and will be here with the road company of *The Mikado*. She's sending me two passes to the play, box seats, and I'm to come backstage afterward. How would you like to go to dinner with me, attend the show, and meet Kitti and the company?"

"Oh, how wonderful!" Patsy cried ecstatically. "The girls will be raving with jealousy."

On the night *The Mikado* opened, Marcy and her cousin dined at the Copley Plaza, and went on to the play. Both of them enjoyed it greatly, a good cast, splendid costumes and sets, and Kitti Carnesi was more than beautiful, she was dazzling.

When the two went backstage after the final curtain, they found Kitti in *dishabille* in her dressing room. She screamed when she saw Marcy, threw her arms around her, and kissed her on both cheeks. "Marceline! I think often of how you and Carlo sail past me and Denis in the cloud of dust! Ah, what a wonderful day that was—but I t'ink I drank too much *vino*. And you and my darling Carlo, you win the race. Now, this is your cousin, you say in your note, this pretty girl?"

"Yes, Patsy Laughlin—she's Dora's niece, too."

"Miss Carnesi, I am so—so thrilled! Marcy told me about you, but not the half of it. When I heard you sing tonight, I just melted. Thank you for seeing us."

"So you like me, even though you see me half-naked, like this?" Kitti laughed, and did a pirouette, her lacy petticoats fanning out. Her bare arms and shoulders were marble, and her low-cut camisole revealed a startling display of voluptuous breasts, but Kitti did not seem to mind. She said "Br-r-r! Your Boston is a chilly place. Come, help me with my gown, my dear. My dresser is ill tonight."

Flattered to be able to help this ravishing creature, Patsy spread the dress and held it so Kitti could slip it over her

head. From its depths came Kitti's muffled voice, "Have you heard from my Carlo?"

Marcy watched Kitti pull the dress down over her shoulders, and smooth the taut fabric over her hips. She had been a little hurt at lack of news from Carlo. It may have shown in her voice as she said, "No, Kitti. I suppose he is too busy."

"I think he writes to your San Francisco address," Kitti said quickly. "I have sent him the one here. He is busy, yes, he is like the chicken with the head cut off. I'm sure he is grease and oil all the time. He is finishing the new Vinca, Model Four, he call it. So busy with the new factory since he get the loan from Costain *Frères*—"

"He got the loan? Kitti, what good news!" Marcy exclaimed.

"Sure, they send a man from Paris, he looks at books, he looks at plans. When he go back to Paris, Paris says Ho Kay. Fat mortgage, fat interest, but Carlo don't care, he gets his factory. I think he writes you about it. But enough, come now out to the Green Room, you have a glass of wine, meet the others."

Though the Green Room was crowded, Marcy and her cousin were able to meet most of the principals. The theater people proved very gracious, and almost as handsome and pretty offstage as they were on. Not being of the elect, the girls did not stay long. As they said goodbye, Kitti took them each by an arm, and between them, went out into the hall.

She said in a stage whisper, "Marcy, I tell you now one big secret. Denis comes once more to this country next month, and I think he ask me to marry him. He write he brings big diamond ring, so I'm think he will—what you say?—pop the question." She released them and spun a graceful and dramatic pirouette. "What you think of that? I will be Mrs. Denis Howerth, Lady Wolverton! Some fun, eh, kid?"

"It's perfect, Kitti," Marcy said. "Denis is one of the very best, and so are you. What does his mother think about it?"

"Oh, she likes Kitti very much. I think sometimes it is she who pushes Denis into this. She say the Howerths go to seed, need the new blood, need good Italian peasant girl to shake them up. We get along just fine."

"You'll be playing in New York when Denis comes? I'll try to get down to meet him, maybe I could take you two to dinner to celebrate."

"Denis would like that, he speaks often of the pretty

American with the hair of fire. He make me madly jealous of you." Laughing, she kissed Marcy resoundingly, hugged Patsy, and left them, to return to the Green Room.

As the two girls left the theater, Patsy said, "I envy you, Marce, you know so many exciting people. I wish I did." Then she brightened. "I will too, someday, if—if certain things come to pass."

Marcy spent the holidays in Syracuse with her best friend Evelyn Harkins. A very normal American family, of the middle class, the Harkinses took Marcy into their circle graciously and without reserve. They were so friendly and down to earth it was only when the bells rang and the whistles blew to usher in 1902 that Marcy thought back with some sadness to the two years before. Was she the same Marcy Tarrant of the Nautilus Ball? Was she the same Marcy Tarrant who had heard the New Year in in an apartment overlooking Central Park? She didn't think so. Yet when Evelyn's younger sister, Helen, played "After the Ball," and the group around the piano began to sing that sad ballad, then Marcy felt unwanted tears dew her eyelashes, and she had to pretend a sudden coughing spell to conceal them. *Where is Paul Costain tonight,* she wondered, *and who is he with? Not that I care one bit,* she thought fiercely.

Three letters arrived at the same time from Carlo. Two had been forwarded from San Francisco, the third came to her Boston address. She read them eagerly, finding that Carlo wrote much as he spoke, gentle, concerned, affectionate.

"Things are going well," he wrote in his latest letter.

> Now I work only fourteen hours a day. We will soon be in production with my new Model Four, much improved over Vinca of the Luton-Peterborough race. I hope to make six cars per month, then reach ten before the year is over. Much trials and tribulations, but we get there yet, eh?
>
> Dear Marcy, how can I ever thank you for your help in getting this loan from Costain's? I made the rounds of our Italian bankers, but they will not help. Then comes the Costain man, he likes my Vinca, but thinks my plans are too risky, he tells me before he goes back to Paris. That makes me very sad, but then comes the word that the Paris office has approved the loan, overruling their man. I know that is because you put in the so good word for me, dear Marcy. You have gained my eternal gratitude. I will pour upon you my thanks in person when next we meet, which my heart hopes will be soon.

Marcy thought indulgently, *You are most welcome, dear*

Carlo, and may you never know the quid pro quo *by which that loan was assured. Though I can't say I was an unwilling bargainer. I had my own motives as well. I hope only that the Costains didn't put you in a straitjacket of heavy interest and outside control. I think* Maman, *like Shylock, will demand her pound of your flesh if you default in the slightest degree.*

In mid-January Marcy received a rapturous letter from Kitti Carnesi:

> Marceline, so sorry you could not get to New York when Denis was here. We both missed you. Denis sends his love, what he has left over from me, his Kitti. Marcy, he gives me ring with a diamond like the headlights on Carlo's Vinca, so valuable I am afraid to wear it. We will be married at Ashdown in June. I hope you can come. I think everybody in Europe, they will be there, all crowns and tiaras and decorations and tight corsets.
>
> Denis wants me to leave the stage after we are married, but I have not yet promised I would. I love the theater. Maybe I can find short engagements—I would like to choose my own roles. I can be choosy now that I do not have to sing for my supper any longer!

Marcy was pleased at the engagement, fond as she was of the lovely young singer and the charming Lord Wolverton. She thought it unlikely she would accept the wedding invitation. Besides the time, she was sure she would feel out of place among all the royalty and near-royalty. As for the New York trip, she had no regrets, knowing she would have been intruding on a newly engaged couple head over heels in love.

As the next two months passed, Marcy spent much of her spare time typing her monograph on the European auto industry, using the beautiful new Underwood machine her father had sent her for Christmas. She had practiced her typing with Tarrant determination, until by now she was competent, though not as fast as she wished. But that would come with time.

When she submitted the paper, Professor Furlong complimented her. He thought so well of it he asked if he might send it in for publication. It was a new thrill for Marcy when the monograph was published in *Motor Age*, one of the best of the new flock of trade papers. And she received an honorarium of two hundred dollars, plus free copies of the magazine. The copies she sent proudly to Tarrant Motors,

Inc. and Tom Tarrant bragged about his talented daughter to all of San Francisco. Marcy and Evelyn Harkins blew the two hundred dollars on de luxe dinners and the best seats in the house for all the new plays, ballets, and operettas.

CHAPTER XXIV

As winter loosed its grip on New England, and the V's of wild geese honked north, Marcy had little time for much beyond college work, an occasional theater party, or a drive in the country on a sunny afternoon. Several times she had called Patsy Laughlin to invite her to go along, but each time Patsy had put her off. Patsy seemed distant and noncommittal about her activities.

"I don't know what's got into her," Marcy confided to her friend Evelyn Harkins. "I know Patsy would have loved *DuBarry*, but when I called and asked her to go with us, she pleaded 'a sick headache—you know' so I didn't press the matter."

"I ran into her in Filene's a while back. We chatted a minute, but she seemed in a hurry," Evelyn said. "I didn't think she looked well. She was overweight, for one thing."

"Poor Pat! She has a constant fight against weight. She loves food."

On a sunny morning in April, Marcy found herself with a Saturday uncluttered and uncommitted. Her cleaning woman had come the day before, and the apartment shone like a jewel. Her wardrobe was all clean and pressed. Her schoolwork was up to date, even ahead in some courses. Letters to her father, to Aunt Dora, and to Carlo were finished, sealed and stamped, ready for the postman. The Panhard was at the curb and she felt free as a bird. She went to the wall telephone and was about to lift the receiver to ring Evelyn when the phone rang.

Evelyn! Marcy thought. *She's read my mind.*

But it was not Evelyn. An agitated voice asked, "Is this Miss Tarrant? Patricia Laughlin's cousin? I'm Mrs. Ferguson, Miss Laughlin's landlady. I wish you would come out here right away. I heard her cryin' in her room and when I went up to see if she needed help, she was unconscious."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," Marcy said. "You've called her doctor? He's coming? Good. Don't worry, Mrs. Ferguson. I'm sure she'll be all right."

Marcy wished she were as sure, as she pulled on a jacket

and raced down the stairs. The faithful Panhard started at the first pull of the crank, and Marcy was thankful that her pet hadn't chosen this time to get temperamental. She drove faster than was practical through the Boston streets. Fortunately traffic was light this Saturday morning, so Marcy was able to take a few chances, once making the Clydesdales of a brewery dray snort and shy as she flashed in front of them, ignoring the curses the teamster yelled after her.

The Panhard screeched to a stop in front of Mrs. Ferguson's, and Marcy jumped out. She ran up the steps, burst into the entrance hall, and raced up the stairs to Patsy's room.

Mrs. Ferguson, a stout woman, was waiting, pale and distraught. "Dr. Warner ain't here yet," she said. "But he's on his way. I'm afraid your cousin is a mighty sick girl."

Marcy looked down at Patsy. The girl was ashen, her eyes closed. She was curled in a ball, dressed in skirt and shirtwaist, though Mrs. Ferguson had removed the shoes. Leaning close, Marcy found Patsy's breathing slow and shallow. Now Marcy caught the heavy scent of some drug. The odor keyed something deep in her memory. In a moment it came to her—laudanum. She touched her cousin's cheek; the skin was cold. The lips were livid. Forcing an eyelid open, Marcy saw the pupil was a mere pinpoint. The pulse in her throat was very slow.

"She's taken laudanum," Marcy told Mrs. Ferguson. "Help me get her undressed, and into the bathroom."

Between them, they dragged the limp girl into the adjoining bathroom. The movement seemed to bring her around a little, so Marcy and the landlady were able to get a liberal quantity of saltwater down her. In desperation, Marcy put a finger deep into the girl's throat. Patsy coughed, strangled, then vomited into the toilet as Mrs. Ferguson supported her.

"I think that got rid of a lot of it," Mrs. Ferguson said. "Should we give her more warm water?"

"Let's wait. The doctor will be here soon," Marcy said. "Come, let's get her to bed, and the rest of her clothes off."

They had just gotten Patsy out of her stained camisole and stripped her of underthings and hose, when a bearded gentleman carrying a black bag came hurrying up the stairs.

"I'm Dr. Warner," he said to Marcy. "What has happened to Miss Laughlin?"

"By the smell, she's taken laudanum," Marcy said. "I'm her cousin, Marceline Tarrant. Doctor, we gave her an

emetic which acted well, but she became unconscious again after."

His hand on Patsy's pulse, the doctor looked down at her. He stroked his white goatee thoughtfully. He shook his head and reached for his medical bag.

"These little fools," he said, preparing a hypodermic syringe. "There's been an epidemic of this sort of thing lately. It's spring, and they're disappointed in love, and they think that's the end of everything. So they attempt suicide."

He sucked liquid from a small vial into the hypodermic, measuring the amount with the greatest of care. "And that's why I'm prepared to cope with an overdose of opiate."

He swabbed Patsy's upper arm with alcohol, and carefully injected the liquid. Withdrawing the needle, he said, "There, this nalorphine ought to bring her breathing back to normal in a hurry. Yes, yes. Watch this."

Marcy saw an almost miraculous change begin in Patsy. Her breathing deepened, the rising and falling of her voluptuous bosom became more regular. A tinge of color brightened the pale cheeks.

"All right, Miss Tarrant, let's get her out of the bed," Dr. Warner said. "Mrs. Ferguson, we'll need about a gallon of coffee, hot and black. Come, we've got to keep her moving. Miss Tarrant, help me walk her."

At first Patsy was as limp as a rag doll. Then she began to take lagging steps as the doctor on one side and Marcy on the other made her walk. She moaned softly. "Wanna—wanna lay down," she mumbled. But Dr. Warner was adamant, and the forced round of the room continued.

Marcy asked, "Doctor, what did you mean when you spoke of young things disappointed in love?"

"It's obvious, isn't it?" the doctor said disgustedly. "Surely someone as close as you—a cousin—must have noticed. That change in her figure didn't come from whipped cream and charlotte russe, Miss Tarrant. Your cousin is pregnant. About six months along, I'd guess. I suppose she's been hiding her condition, but she came to me a couple weeks ago for a bad cold she had, and it was inevitable that I'd learn of her condition."

"Doctor, she isn't married," Marcy said. "She comes from a very strict family, and they—"

"I know, they'll put this child through hell," he said sharply. He lowered his voice. "She even asked me if there was a way to get rid of the fetus. I told her it was too late for that, she would need a caesarian section to abort it at

this stage. I told her for God's sake not to go to an alley butcher to try it."

"Did—did she say anything about the father?" Marcy asked.

Dr. Warner shook his head. "Not a word. But when I suggested she try to get the father to marry her, she brightened considerably. Apparently that didn't work out, though."

When Mrs. Ferguson came back with the pot of black coffee, they seated Patsy in a chair. The girl shivered in her light robe as the doctor and Marcy made her swallow cupful after cupful of the strong brew. At the second cup she retched and threw up again, but then managed to keep the coffee down. The color came back in lips and cheeks, and her movements grew less languid. Her speech remained too slurred and incoherent to answer Dr. Warner's questions.

An hour later the doctor stood up from his chair beside the bed, and snapped shut his black bag. "She'll be all right now," he said. "She should sleep for twenty-four hours, and be pretty much herself when she wakes up. Then you'd better have a long talk with her, Miss Tarrant. She needs help, and needs it badly, though I doubt if she'll try this again."

"I'll do my best, Doctor," Marcy said, going with him to the door. "We'll be in to see you in a few days. We'll find some solution."

His gray eyes were sharp above the white beard. "Remember, no abortionists. They'll kill her."

"No, I'm sure she'll have the baby. But facing up to her family will be real torture." She shook her head sadly.

"Have her think about this. I know of a few barren couples who would take a good healthy child in a minute, and bring it up in a good, loving home. That is, if she's willing."

"If I know Patsy, she will be," Marcy told him.

When Dr. Warner had gone, Marcy sat for a while beside the bed of the sleeping girl. An immense pity for Patsy tugged at her. *Why didn't she come to me when she knew she was in trouble?* Then with a sense of shame, Marcy admitted the reason. She had been too concerned with her own affairs, her own interests, to be close to Patsy. And Patsy was so young, so immature; they had little in common. Still, Marcy felt she never did try hard enough to fit Patsy into her world. She reached over and touched Patsy's hand, silently begging forgiveness.

I will see her through this as I promised Dr. Warner. It

won't be easy for either of us—she'll come through it, though, the Laughlins are made of pretty stern stuff. She'll be a little scarred, but she'll find her place again, she's such a pretty thing, so ingenuous. And that fine talent—

Standing up, she moved restlessly around the room. She straightened things, gathering Patsy's soiled clothes for laundering. She looked in the closet, and found her cousin's extensive wardrobe in good order. The Godwin desk was jammed with letters, clippings, bills, sketches, and scribbled notes, which Marcy left alone as beyond her abilities. *My sweet coz can hardly be called neat,* she thought, and picked up a used handkerchief and, from beside the wastebasket, a ball of paper.

More from habit than curiosity, she smoothed it out. It was a Western Union telegraph form. The yellow page read:

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.
PATRICIA LAUGHLIN
635 STEARNS STREET
BOSTON, MASS.

WHAT YOU PROPOSE IS IMPOSSIBLE STOP I AM TRULY SORRY STOP CHARGE IT OFF TO SUMMER ROMANCE

BOY NEXT DOOR

Paul Costain! It was Paul—Paul—who had impregnated Patsy. No wonder, when Patsy had signed for this brutal telegram and torn it open, she had tried to take her own life.

In that moment of realization something died in Marcy, the spark, barely admitted, that had smoldered for Paul over two long years. *Paul, my hero, Paul, my romantic lover, Paul, the epitome of a girl's desire, is gone,* she thought dully. She looked down at the sleeping Patsy and a great flood of indignation swept over her. Any love for Paul that lingered vanished in bitter contempt.

She crumpled the telegram again and threw it into the wastebasket, as if by that gesture she was tossing Paul out of her life, and Patsy's. In another symbolic act, she went to the window, opened the curtains, and raised the shade, as if letting bright sunshine into the room and into the dark corners of her mind. She wondered if it would wipe away the false image of Paul, the Paul who existed only in the romantic dreams of stupid girls?

The light half-aroused Patsy, who moaned and turned on her side, crumpling back into sleep. In the brighter light, Marcy noticed a picture in a far corner she hadn't seen be-

fore. She studied it—a portrait in oil of Paul Costain, well done, idealized. He stared out from the frame handsomer even than he was in the flesh. God, but Patsy had talent! This likeness of a smiling young man, elegant in evening dress, was so striking that Marcy knew it was a labor of love. She stared at it, her lip curling in scorn. She said softly, "Paul, you are a cad, a rotten, egotistical boor, a damned roué. For what you did to Patsy—" She reached up and turned the portrait to the wall.

A little later she left Patsy in the care of the watchful Mrs. Ferguson, and returned to her own apartment, after promising to return the next day. That night she slept little, wrestling with the problems of Patsy's pregnancy. She thought of several alternatives, but whether any of them would suit Patsy she could not guess.

When she entered Patsy's room in the house on Stearns Street the next day, she found her cousin up and dressed. She looked quite healthy again, and in good spirits.

"Have you eaten, Pat?" Marcy asked. Her cousin nodded affirmatively. "Then get your jacket, we're going for a ride in the fresh air."

"That's O.K.," Patsy said, slipping into a warm coat.

"You feel all right?" Marcy asked, taking her arm.

"Oh, just fine," Patsy said, starting down the stairs. "At least as fine as any sister of Hester Prynne would feel, of course. You know, Marcy?"

Marcy held the outer door open. "Yes. And I know it was Paul who seduced you. I found the telegram."

No more was said until Patsy was in the car, and Marcy had started the engine. She put the Panhard in gear, and let out the clutch. As the runabout rolled down the street, with the elms just turning green, she glanced at her cousin.

Patsy's face was twisted with hurt. She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief. In a choked voice she said, "Marce, how could Paul do that to me? I loved him more than anyone ever could, from the time we were kids. When you took him away from me after the Nautilus Ball, I hated you. When he sailed off to the South Seas and broke your heart—yes, I know!—I was glad, glad. And when you went to Europe last summer and left me a free field, I wasn't going to miss my chance. I was so desperately wanting him I was ready to surrender anything to make him mine, and I did."

"So he took advantage of you," Marcy said numbly.

"I suppose you could call it that, though I literally flung

myself at him," Patsy said. "He squired me around, we went sailing, but it wasn't until just before I left in September that he took me one evening to his apartment on Sacramento Street. I must have made a satisfactory whore, Marcy, because after that first experience, he took me to bed two other times."

"Don't call yourself that!" Marcy said sharply. "It isn't true. I'm going to take you to some place where we can talk."

The Panhard chugged along the Sunday streets, the traffic light, a few carriages and phaetons behind well-groomed horses, taking the affluent to church; an automobile now and then; a covey of cyclists, a club perhaps, the men in knickerbockers, the girls in voluminous bloomers; farther along, a crowd of people in Sunday finery going home from Mass.

Marcy stopped the runabout in a little park overlooking the Embankment. Across the Charles stood the noble buildings of the Institute. When she turned off the engine, she and her cousin sat silent for long minutes. Finally Marcy said, "Honey, what have you decided to do?"

Patsy looked at her, those great soft eyes filled with woe. "Marce, I don't know what to do. My whole world has fallen apart. Since I got that awful telegram, I can't think straight. I was so sure Paul would—I never dreamed he was a coward. The love I had for him has turned to hate. I hate him like poison. If I never hear from him, or talk to him, or see him again, it will be too soon."

"Don't let your hate make you destroy that portrait of him in your room," Marcy said drily. "It's marvelous, no matter who the subject was. Pat, the talent you have, our world needs. Don't sacrifice it because of an unfortunate love affair."

"You really think the portrait is that good, Marce?" Patsy smiled shakily. "I believe I will keep it, to remind me of what a trusting, stupid little fool I was."

"No more drastic acts, honey?"

Patsy shook her head. "That was dumb too, wasn't it? But I thought the world was ended, and I didn't want to live. Now it's tomorrow, and I want to live, and laugh, and start over again. And I will, just as soon as I get rid of this nasty little thing I'm carrying around. But how, Marce? Have you thought of anything?"

"Let's get down to cases, as Daddy would say," Marcy said. "I think the first thing we should do is wire your folks."

"My God, Marce, that's the one thing I won't do!" Patsy cried. "Mamma would die on the spot, and Dad would go all cold. Neither would ever forgive me. And Aunt Dora—"

"You might find Dora a pillar of strength on your side," Marcy said, out of privy knowledge of her aunt. "But you're right, your parents would be devastated, ashamed to face the social world. So what's next?"

"No abortion, Marce. Dr. Warner says the thing is too far along, and besides, it would be murder, and against my religion. So I'll just—just carry this thing until it is born, and then I'll sell or give away the nasty little beast as quickly as I can find someone to take it."

Patsy's vehemence startled Marcy, though she supposed it was understandable. "Then you have no maternal feelings for the child?" she asked.

"Why should I? It's an accident, a joke of nature. I hate it just as I hate Paul Costain. It's part of him; a baby should be part of a marriage, a happy life full of hope. Oh, no, Marcy, I let my animal instinct blind my reason, but I'll be damned before I let it spoil my only life."

"So that's that," Marcy said slowly. "Count on me, Pat, I'll stick with you. But you'll have to mind, you hear? First, you must keep on with your art classes at the Conservatory as long as you are able."

"Oh, Marce, with me getting bigger and bigger, and stumbling around like a clumsy pumpkin? Everybody will laugh at me," Patsy wailed.

"No, they won't. We'll concoct a story about a secret marriage, and parental objections, which is true enough, and if you work it right, everyone will be solicitious and eager to help you. You can't just sit around and brood, honey. The time will pass faster if you are doing creative work. Something else creative, I mean," she added with a laugh, and managed to draw a wan smile from Patsy. "Let's see, the man is a sailor, on a world cruise. He can't reach here in time for the blessed event. I'll type some letters to you—I can get Dom Renfrow to remail them from San Francisco. Show them around, very sad yet proud, and all your friends will love it. The thicker you lay it on, the better. Why baby, you're a cinch!"

"And who will I be?"

"Something classy. Mrs. Addison Brewer, how's that? You can drop the pretense after the baby is born."

"But Marce, when the time comes—Marce, I'm scared!"

"You mustn't worry. You're husky and healthy, and we'll

find you the best gynecologist in Boston. Dr. Warner has the look of the perfect conspirator. I'm sure he will help hush the matter up. Remember, you're three thousand miles from home."

CHAPTER XXV

In late May, Marcy went with Patsy to see Dr. Warner again. Patsy was, as she put it, "as big as a house." She had kept up her studies at the Conservatory until the week before, and had now developed a mood that was, if not happy, at least fatalistic. On occasion, though, Marcy would have to go to some lengths to cheer her cousin up.

At the end of the examination, Dr. Warner said bluntly, "Young lady, you're as healthy as a brood mare. I don't foresee any complications in your confinement. Sorry I won't be here to officiate, but I'm leaving next week for a long visit to my daughter in Montana."

"You won't be here? Oh, Doctor, I trust you so," Patsy said morosely.

"Don't worry, I'm making arrangements for you to go to the Moorhaven Clinic over in Woburn. They are most competent, and—ah, very discreet. Best go there under your own name, though, to avoid complications in the adoption. You are determined to put the child up for adoption, are you?"

"Yes. I want it out of my life," Patsy said tersely.

"All right. I'll have my nurse send your case history on to Moorhaven. You had better go there ahead of time and make arrangements final. Then when your time comes you can be checked in without bother or waste of time."

The two girls stood up. "Thank you, Doctor," Marcy said. "You've been wonderful. We're both so grateful. Have a nice trip out West. Oh, and I'll take care of our bill as I leave."

"No hurry," Dr. Warner said. He walked with them to the door of his inner office. He shook hands with Marcy and put a hand on Patsy's shoulder. "I'm sure you're going to be fine, young lady, so the best of luck to you at Moorhaven. And a bit of advice from an old man to a pretty girl—you can avoid another ordeal such as this one if you get married —or stay chaste."

Marcy paid the bill, since Patsy's allowance was not large and was strictly audited.

Marcy helped Patsy get located in a light, airy room in a

residential hotel only a short distance from the Moorhaven Clinic. There she would await her *accouchement,* before moving into the Clinic. Patsy felt nauseated, so Marcy volunteered to walk over to Moorhaven and complete the preliminary arrangements.

A rather bored young woman in white presided at the admissions desk. Marcy told her, "I'm Marceline Tarrant. I'd like to make advance reservations for the confinement of a—a friend of mine. She'll reach term in a week or ten days."

"Ah, yes, a friend," the nurse said smiling knowingly, scanning Marcy's voluminous motoring duster. She made some notes on a pad. "And your references, Mrs. Tarrant? Moorhaven is the finest maternity hospital in New England, and most discreet, but our rates are accordingly quite expensive."

"That's no problem. My bank is the Beacon Trust of Boston. I'm sure Dr. Warner, who recommended Moorhaven, will give you a further reference if need be."

"Very well, then. And his office will forward your medical records?"

"Yes, his nurse is taking care of it. But they're not—"

The telephone rang, and the nurse said, "Excuse me." She had a rather long conversation of a personal nature, while Marcy fidgeted.

When she hung up Marcy said, "You understand this is for a friend."

The nurse gave her a knowing smile. "Oh, of course, Mrs. Tarrant. These matters are often handled by proxy, as it were."

Going down the outer steps, Marcy was puzzled by the receptionist's manner. Surely she didn't think Marcy was *enceinte.* Any damned fool could recognize that she wouldn't be carrying a nine-months' baby, she reasoned. Then she realized that her duster concealed her figure completely. She smiled. She bet that was what the woman thought, not that it made any great difference.

Marcy was in the middle of final exams when Patsy's baby, as babies will, chose that most inconvenient time to make its entrance into an unready world. A note was passed to Marcy in the classroom, and at the end of the hour she called Patsy.

"I think I'd better be going, Marce," Patsy said over the phone, her voice quite matter-of-fact. "The pains are becoming quite regular. I need you, please come."

"Oh, Pat dear, I can't right now. I've the most important exam of my life in the next hour," Marcy cried. "Listen, if you must go, call a cab to take you over to Moorhaven. They'll be expecting you; all the arrangements have been made. Tell them you're the one Miss Tarrant made the reservation for. They should have your records by now from Dr. Warner's nurse. Hang tight, I'll be with you just as soon as I can."

It was almost two hours later when Marcy cranked the Panhard into life and headed for Moorhaven. She drove fast, taut with frustration, for it had been hard to keep her mind on the exam, with Patsy undergoing her ordeal. Now it started to rain, and she had to move the rubber wiper across the windshield with her right hand. She blessed John O'Brien for the Michelin tires, which hummed sweetly on the wet pavement.

At last she turned up the curving drive through the main gate of Moorhaven, and stopped the runabout near the entrance. She jumped out and ran up the steps, head lowered against the chill rain. The girl at the desk was not the svelte blonde, but a pudgy dark-haired girl. Marcy's cool and logical mind had ceased to function, so in her agitation she asked, "My—I'm—well, my cousin is having a baby. Could you tell me where—"

"Why, you must be Miss Laughlin," the girl said, her manner indulgent. "Mrs. Tarrant told us to expect you. Now simmer down, Miss Laughlin, I know you're excited, but your cousin is already out of the delivery room and you are the aunt of a brand-new, seven pound, bouncing baby boy."

"But I'm not—" Marcy began, feeling that the conversation had turned into something out of *Alice in Wonderland*.

With a wave of the hand, the nurse dismissed airily Marcy's attempt at explanation. She stood up. "Come along, come along, Miss Laughlin. Your cousin had a very easy delivery, so I'm sure the doctor won't mind if you see her. I'll take you to her room."

Frowning, Marcy followed the nurse into a room as pleasant as any hospital room could be. She said "Just don't tire her, Miss Laughlin. You must leave in fifteen minutes." She went out, closing the door behind her.

Marcy looked down at her cousin. Patsy looked a little pale, but otherwise positively beautiful. She saw Patsy's eyes come slowly open, and seeing Marcy, she smiled.

"You're late, Marce," she said accusingly.

"I did the best I could. It's raining," Marcy said. She

leaned down and kissed her cousin. "Thank God you and the child are both all right. But Pat, what on earth is this 'Miss Laughlin, Mrs. Tarrant' business?"

Patsy made a moué at her and chuckled. "Moorhaven has a fine medical staff, but their clerical staff is hardly half bright. When I lurched in, the girl thumbed through her cards and announced that I was Marceline Tarrant. I was about to set her straight when I had the most wonderful idea. It will be Marceline Tarrant who brings the brat into the world, and Patricia Laughlin will have nothing to do with it."

"Patsy, you little fool!" Marcy said sharply. "Think of what you've done to me. My God; this is indefensible!"

Tears welled into Patsy's great eyes and trickled down her cheeks. Exasperated as she was, Marcy took her handkerchief and wiped them away. "There, there, dear, tell Marcy the rest of it," she said. "Come clean, now."

"So I didn't say I wasn't you, Marce. I had been referred by Dr. Warner, I said, 'and the pains are coming quicker, and you'd better do something about it.' The girl made a hurried search in her files for the Tarrant record, and of course she didn't find them. She saw that I couldn't hold off any longer, so she called for help, and I went straight to the delivery room. Fifteen minutes later I heard a baby squall, and in a little while they wheeled me in here and I went to sleep."

"Did you see your little boy?" Marcy asked.

Patsy's face twisted. "I didn't even look at him. I don't want to see him, ever. He's Paul Costain's, and I don't want to see Paul ever again, or the baby either."

Shocked, Marcy asked, "Pat, why did you use my name?"

Patsy turned on her side, her back to Marcy. In a voice muffled by the coverlet, she said, "Because—because you could carry the burden better than I. You're strong, Marcy, I'm just a weak sister, you know that. Remember that you took Paul away from me, so part of the guilt is yours. To face the world, Marce—"

Marcy said impatiently, "This is not the time to argue guilt or innocence. You must realize you've put me in a terrible light. I must ask, you don't want the boy, then?"

"To *hell* with the brat! I don't even want to see it. My life could be ruined because of it. I'll get rid of it by adoption just as soon as it can be managed."

"All right. I'll go along with this masquerade for the time

being. In the long run, it may not make any great difference. We'll talk about it tomorrow. You'll be feeling better then."

"Talk all you want, but I'll never change my mind, never," Patsy said flatly. "I hate Paul Costain, and I hate his baby, and I want both of them out of my life. You just don't have—have any feeling, Marceline Tarrant." She buried her face in the pillow, her body racked by sobs.

Marcy went out and closed the door behind her, suppressing the urge to slam it. She found the floor nurse and asked, "Could I see the new Tarrant baby, please?" The words had a strange ring, and she felt something stir in her.

The nurse led Marcy down a hallway to a window looking in on a small forest of cribs. Asking Marcy to wait, she went in and from a blue-blanketed crib she lifted a swathed bundle and brought it out to the hall. She unfolded the blanket from the tiny face.

Marcy gasped for there was little doubt that this child had been fathered by Paul Costain. The wealth of dark hair, the wrinkled old-man face, the button nose which would lengthen into Paul's patrician one. Marcy felt a great surge of warmth, an odd attraction to this tiny child.

"You don't have a cold?" the nurse asked. Marcy shook her head. "Would you like to hold him for a minute?" The nurse smiled, and without ado she placed the baby in Marcy's arms.

Holding him as carefully as if he were glass, Marcy looked down at the pink face. Now the baby opened his eyes, stared in an unfocused glance at Marcy, gurgled, and went back to sleep. Marcy held him a few moments longer, then, her breath coming fast, she handed him back to the nurse.

"He's a pretty child," the nurse commented, moving toward the door of the nursery. Then she smiled. "All newborn babies are beautiful, I think."

As Marcy drove back to her apartment, bemused by the miracle of the newborn infant, impatient with Patsy because of her recalcitrance about it, she could not avoid the thought which kept nagging at her. A plan kept forming, an audacious plan, a plan so daring and sacrificial it might change her whole life. *I'd be breaking all the rules,* she thought. *I'd be a marked woman. But I can't let that innocent mite be adopted into the home of strangers.*

That child was the son of Paul Costain, her first love, and he was a Laughlin, she remembered. The Irish took care of their own in war, famine, flood and pestilence. And she couldn't—wouldn't—let his life be wracked and broken

by abandonment and lack of love, as was the life of Barry Olden. Over Barry's body she'd made a silent vow never to reject a child, never to condemn a child to the tortures of the damned that poor Barry suffered because he was shunted aside, forsaken by those who should have loved him.

An odd thought intruded, the thought of a man, Carlo Ferroni. She would never forget the selfless compassion Carlo had shown for the boy Jamie Morgan. Though winning the Great Motor Race meant a great deal to Carlo, he had not hesitated for a moment to help the boy. He had not rejected Jamie, he had not counted his costs, he had merely recognized the great need of a small human being, and he had answered the call.

With exams over, Marcy had no classes the next day. She picked up Patsy's mail and took it to the hospital. Her cousin, looking quite well and animated, though a trifle pale, tossed aside bills, and notes, and like a child with a bonbon, saved the one letter from San Francisco to the last. Marcy sat quietly while Patsy tore it open and read it, first with a smile, then with a frown marking her pretty face. She put down the letter with a groan of dismay.

"Marce, what's the date today?" she asked.

"June fifth," Marcy told her.

"I've got to be out of this clinic by the thirteenth," Patsy said, her eyes squinted in calculation.

Marcy rubbed her chin. "Nine days. You might make it. Usually new mothers are kept in for ten days, but you're so damnably healthy, you might talk the doctor into letting you go sooner. Why the thirteenth, Pat?"

"Mamma's going to be here on the fifteenth. And we're sailing on the *Campania* for Europe on the eighteenth. Oh, Marce, think of it! The grand tour—England, France, Italy, Greece, and Germany. We'll be gone three full months, Mamma says. Museums, art galleries, cathedrals—and some places of my own Mamma hasn't listed. I'm so excited!"

"And perhaps a few boys," Marcy said drily. "But my dear, aren't you forgetting a certain obligation you have here?"

"Obligation? Oh, you mean the brat." Patsy's animation changed to gloom. "Marce, what will I do with it?"

"You could strangle it, of course," Marcy said.

"Oh, Marce, it isn't like you to be cruel!" Patsy cried with unconscious irony. "Please, start the wheels turning. You—we have eight days to find some couple that wants

it. We'll slash away the red tape and get the adoption over with before Mamma gets here."

"Pat, have you seen the child?"

Patsy shook her head determinedly. "I have not, nor do I intend to. I told the doctor that my husband, Jack Tarrant, had been lost at sea, and I had learned he had betrayed me with another woman, so I wanted no part of the child he had fathered."

"Quite ingenious, dear, and fairly believable," Marcy said. She looked at Patsy for a moment, drew a deep breath, and took the plunge. "Pat, I have the perfect solution for you. I want that boy. I'll take him."

Patsy stared at her, aghast. "Marce, that's crazy! You don't have a husband. What would people say? Besides, the court would never let an unmarried woman adopt a child. It would shake the Commonwealth to its roots. You can't do it, Marcy; you'd be ostracized by society, and no decent man would—"

"None of that matters to me," Marcy said firmly. "I don't really give a damn what people say. I'll stand up to the whole world. I want that boy. Pat, I have reasons so subtle, so deep, I could never explain them to you, so I won't try. As for the adoption—what adoption? That baby, Thomas Michael Tarrant, is the son of Marceline Norah Tarrant, my son. That's what the official record says."

"Marcy, you'll never get away with it!"

"The hell I won't!" Marcy snapped. "The Moorhaven people are convinced. A few more judicious lies as we leave, with you playing the Marcy role, and I'm home free. I'll walk out that front door with my baby, and he'll be as legal as any child that ever left this hospital."

"But—but—" Patsy sputtered.

"But me no buts, as Henry Fielding said," Marcy told her firmly. "Sweet coz, my mind is made up. So don't interfere, unless you want me to dump the whole mess into the lap of Mamma Claribel." She didn't try to keep the edge of threat from her voice. "Now, I'll need two things from you. First, you must sign a letter granting me all rights, present or future in the person of this child, in perpetuity, as the lawyers say. The second is that you will never, sick or well, drunk or sober, in speech or writing, divulge to anyone, *anyone,* the least fact about the parentage of *my* child."

Patsy looked at her. Then, solemnly, she made across her bosom the ancient childhood gesture of truth. "I promise,

Marcy, by Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I promise. Never a word, to any soul."

"All right. I'll type the paper and bring it tomorrow. It won't be a threat to you, Pat, unless you break your oath. I'll lock it safely in my most secret place, never to appear unless you make me use it. So until tomorrow you can think about it, you can change your mind. After that the matter will be irrevocable."

She left Patsy staring after her as she went out and down the hall to the nursery, to spend a long time looking at her son, Thomas Michael Tarrant.

Patsy did not change her mind, as Marcy was sure she would not, with the dream of the European trip bright before her. With her sturdy Irish peasant health she was well and strong by the twelfth, and the doctor had no objections to releasing her from Moorhaven on the following day.

With the child in her arms, Marcy told the clerk at the cashier's desk, "If I may have the bill, we'll pay it now, in full."

When she had the bill and other papers, she took them to a desk at the side of the reception room, where Patsy waited. Marcy did the actual signing and made out a check on the Beacon Trust for the full amount of Moorhaven's bill. When the business was concluded without incident, they went out the front door and down the steps to the Panhard. Patsy got in, leaned back, and gave a great sigh of relief.

"Well, we made it," Marcy said, handing her the blanketed bundle that was Thomas Michael Tarrant.

"I was scared silly," Patsy said, holding the child awkwardly.

Marcy cranked the runabout into life and got into the driver's seat. Before she put the car in gear, she said, "You're safe now, Pat, so don't be a fool. Take a look at him."

Gingerly Patsy drew back the blue blanket from the wizened face of the sleeping child. Her face softened for a moment. Then it grew hard again. She dropped the fold of cloth back over the baby's face. She said, "He looks like Paul," and stared ahead into the far distance.

Marcy stopped the car at the small hotel near the clinic. "There might be too many questions at your rooming house," she said. "So you have a room here for the night. I'll pick you up in the morning and take you to the station for your New York train."

"Oh, Marce, you're so good," Patsy said, leaning over and

kissing Marcy on the cheek. "But who will take care of the baby?"

Marcy took the child from her cousin, and as Patsy got out, Marcy laid the baby in his blanket on the empty seat. She looked squarely at Patsy. "As far as you are concerned, Patricia Laughlin, the baby no longer exists. He's mine alone to raise, to educate, to love and cherish, mine, do you understand?"

Patsy's face crumpled, and head bowed, she turned and ran to the door of the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVI

Marcy had engaged a Pullman stateroom for herself and the baby for the long transcontinental journey. By the New York Central to Chicago, the Northwestern into Omaha, and the Union Pacific the rest of the way to Oakland. Traveling alone with an infant as tiny as Tommy proved a scary experience, but rewarding. Thomas Michael Tarrant was to be a good baby, raising a fuss only when he was hungry or his diaper needed changing. Most of the time he slept. When he did waken, he cooed at Marcy, staring with the unfocused gaze of the tiny infant.

Chicago was hot and muggy. Omaha was hot and even more humid. Not until the Union Pacific Limited began racing west did the air in Marcy's Pullman begin to seem cooler and fresher. Along the right-of-way the fields looked greener, the animals sleeker, the villages more lively than in the East. *Only my imagination,* Marcy thought, watching as the train rocketed across the long prairies of Wyoming and into the desolation of the Utah desert. *This train seems as anxious as I am to see the ocean. We're going home!*

To prepare her father, she had sent a long but rather ambiguous letter, giving among other things, the time of her arrival with her new baby. Explanations would have to wait until then. She put that difficult prospect aside, and thought of Patsy and Claribel. Had Patsy's own bland ambiguities fooled her mother? No doubt, for Claribel could be quite obtuse, and she had always been able to believe what she wanted to believe. Marcy hoped sincerely the trip would help her pretty cousin to adjust to life again after her ordeal and abandonment by Paul.

She was not happy over the turmoil she faced personally in San Francisco, though she was resigned to it. By her Aunt Dora's account, the social mores had become somewhat looser in these past two years. Yet a Tarrant, and moreover a Laughlin, could not rejoin the elite society of the city as an unwed mother without a spate of gossip and a storm of conjecture. Marcy could hear it—"Hardly acceptable, my dear, in the best drawing rooms, nor to be accepted either

in the companionship of the innocent and unworldly daughters of our great houses." To Marcy the balls and cotillions, the teas and bazaars had seemed empty and self-serving, so she had never become deeply involved in the haughty circles which the breathless gossip reporters called "high society."

The people I knew in the construction camps, Marcy thought, *were crude and uncultured, but genuine.* They had judged others by what they were, not by how they looked, or who they were related to. They had been generous to a fault when trouble or death came to friends. But they had been fiercely intolerant of the snob and the pretender.

Deep in such thoughts, Marcy fanned herself in the blaze of desert heat beyond Ogden. Tommy grew fussy and whimpery, and she stripped him to his diaper. Only when the train went on after a pause at Reno did he grow quiet again as the pine-scented air grew cool along the scarp of the Sierra. He sucked at the bottle Marcy had prepared with her own hands in the diner galley—a generous application of that universal panacea, the ten-dollar greenback, had quieted the protests of the head steward.

As the train climbed the mountain slope, the thunder of the engines' exhausts echoing from the rocks, below it lay the sparkling lake beside which, fifty-six short years before, the Donner party had wintered, freezing and starving until they were reduced to cannibalism. *So much easier to travel now,* Marcy thought, as the engines snorted in triumph crossing the summit of the ridge. The Limited began to clickety-clack down the western descent toward the flatlands of Sacramento, close again to sea level.

While the train sped toward Oakland, Marcy felt a growing excitement, laced with dread. For two years she had not seen these golden hills, nor the silver-gray of the live oaks. As always cattle were grazing on the slopes, hardly lifting their heads as the train rumbled by. So unchanging. Marcy wondered if her beloved city had remained as immutable.

Her fear stemmed from the confrontation she faced with Tough Tom Tarrant. She knew her father's rigid moral code. She hoped that in time he would forgive her for her apparent transgression, but she knew he would not forget. Yet to protect Patsy, and little Tommy himself, she dared not make a full confession to her father.

If he would just accept the baby, she thought, the rest would come in time. But if he would not acknowledge the child as a Tarrant, Marcy faced a complete overturn of her life. For she would not—would *not*—give up her baby,

even if it meant she must make a whole new kind of existence for herself and Tommy. She'd face that if her father turned adamant, and he could do that. God grant his sense of justice and his love for her would temper his anger, she prayed, that he would be as compassionate to Marcy and the baby as he had been to Lucy Bedloe, even though he thought Marcy the same kind of fool that Lucy had been.

Now with a great clanking and hissing of steam, the Limited stopped under the train shed at Oakland. Slowly Marcy gathered her belongings and the baby's equipment. Holding the baby cradled in one arm, she followed the other passengers to the vestibule, and steadied by the gentle hand of the conductor, she hurried down the car steps. And there on the platform, glory be to God, stood Thomas Tarrant and Dora Laughlin.

It came to Marcy that this was a moment she dared not bungle. Putting down her train case and packages on the cinders, she reached out with gentle hands and placed little Tommy in the arms of Tom Tarrant. She said softly, "Daddy, this is your grandson, Thomas Michael Tarrant."

His scarred hands supported the blanketed child, and Marcy saw that the years had not made him forget how to cradle an infant. He lifted the flap of the coverlet away from the child's face. The stony set of the rugged Irish face softened. He smiled, and with the gentlest of forefingers he touched the button nose. "Hello, Thomas," he said. "And Michael, too. Ah, you have the look of a Tarrant, all right, though your hair is not red. He's handsome, Marceline. But about his father—"

"Later, Daddy. When we get home," Marcy said. "Give him to me."

"Oh, let me carry the darling," Dora begged, and Tom Tarrant relinquished the baby to her. He was frowning again as he went to the baggage room to claim Marcy's luggage.

Crossing the Bay on the ferry, Oakland receding behind the boat, Tom Tarrant said with elaborate casualness, "Your letter said you won't be going back East again, Marceline."

"I can't, Dad, with little Tommy to care for. I'll be learning how to be a proper mother. There won't be time for college just yet. My studies at M.I.T. were a fascinating experience, though, so I hope to work toward my degree later at U.S.F., or Berkeley, perhaps at night. There are more important goals right now than a college degree."

He looked at her keenly. "Whatever you say. Remember

we've got two competent women at home who have little enough to do. They can well sit with the child while you go to school. Or—" he hesitated. "You can start to work any time at Tarrant Motors. We can use your talents. God knows our business is growing so fast it scares me."

She patted her father's arm. "Scared? I've never known Tough Tom Tarrant to fear anything that walks, swims, or crawls. Come, Dad, let's go to the forward lounge and let me see my San Francisco coming to meet me."

The joy of that familiar skyline was still touching her when with Dora and the baby she took her place in the Tarrant Oldsmobile limousine. Her father started the engine with a twist of the crank and got behind the wheel. Marcy watched as the big car climbed the hill to Van Ness with contemptuous ease. As it turned off the wide avenue toward Franklin Street, she said, "You drive well, Daddy."

"Thank you, daughter," he said, pride in his voice. He made the turn and braked to a smooth stop in front of the Tarrant house on the west side of Franklin. "It was not easy to rid meself of the old horse-and-buggy habits. But Dom Renfrow was almighty patient, and proved to be a fine instructor."

The servant girls, Mary Tupper and Lulu Leghorn, came hurrying down the steps. They embraced Marcy, cooed to the baby, and gathered up the bundles and packages. Logan Cresap, dour as ever, gave her a shy welcome and picked up the grips and suitcase. The child in her arms, Marcy hurried up the steps behind them.

In the hall, Lulu Leghorn, with benign face and misty eyes, took the baby from her. In their adoration, the two women had no question of Tommy's ancestry or legitimacy. It was enough that here was Miss Marcy's baby, to be fussed over and loved, and Marcy was home again, glory be. The Tarrant family was united.

"Come to the nursery, Miss Marcy, and we'll get this tyke to bed," Lulu said, starting up the stairs. "Soon as Mr. Tom got your letter, we started fixing for the child. We took the old sewing room next your bedroom. Thank God we found a proper use for it at last. The paint ain't hardly dry yet."

Marcy followed Lulu into the room, which was bright and clean and practical. She watched Lulu expertly change the baby and tuck him into bed. Instantly established as the queen of this domain, Lulu would be, Marcy knew, the per-

fect nanny. She was well trained, for she had come to San Francisco as nursemaid for a wealthy English family. But when her employers moved on to settle in Australia, Lulu had balked, saying she wasn't "going to no haythen land where a body was like to get eat up by a emu or a kangaroo or some such outlandish animile," so she had stayed, finding employment with the Tarrants.

Leaving Lulu fussing in glorious content, Marcy left the room. At the head of the stair she paused and took a deep breath. The moment of truth could not be postponed any longer. With reluctant steps she went down to join her father and her aunt.

Tom Tarrant's face was stern as Marcy entered the parlor. "Sit down, Marceline, for there are things I want to know, and I won't be fobbed off any longer."

Dora stood up to leave, looking uneasy, but Tom Tarrant stopped her with a wave of the hand. "You stay, Dora my dear. You are as close to a mother as this lass has." Lips pursed, Dora resumed her place.

Marcy joined her aunt on the chesterfield. Tom Tarrant settled himself in his favorite easy chair facing them. He cleared his throat once, twice. He asked, "This baby now, he has been baptized?"

"With all the pomp and circumstance of the Episcopal Church," Marcy assured him. "He is christened Thomas Michael Tarrant, by a handsome young Boston priest, a most solemn young man, who tried to muster up courage to ask some personal questions of me, but dared not."

"Your father is not so chicken-hearted," Tom Tarrant said gruffly. "I will have answers to my questions, daughter, count on it. I will say it was kind of you to name the little one after me, and my father, God rest his soul."

"I could not think of two better men," Marcy said.

He nodded slowly, and rubbed his granite chin with a hand. At last he said, "And the child's father?"

Marcy shook her head. "The child's father is of no matter, Daddy. He's a nothing, a zero, a cipher. My son does not need that man. Tommy has family enough." She ticked them off on her fingers. "His mother, Marceline Norah Tarrant, his grandfather, Thomas Joseph Tarrant, his aunt Dora Evelyn Laughlin, various other uncles and aunts and cousins. Now he has Mary Jane Tupper to love and spoil him, and a new nanny who adores him, Lulu Leghorn. Does she have a middle name?"

"Letitia," Tom Tarrant said. "Now mavourneen, you do

not satisfy me with that kind of circumlocution. I'll have you tell me about the man, his lineage, his circumstances, the shape of the man who brought you into this deplorable condition."

Again Marcy shook her head. "No. I'll not burden you with that knowledge. Oh, Daddy, please accept our Tommy on my terms. Don't dig deeper into matters very painful to me. Let it be enough that our child is healthy, and appears intelligent. Take him for what he is. He's our baby. Love him and cherish him."

She had angered her father by her recalcitrance, she saw, for that warning vein was throbbing in his temple. Then his eyes narrowed. He asked, "How old is this child of ours?"

Very nearly she fell into his trap. She sensed the ruse in time. "Days, weeks, months, what does it matter? He is well, growing day by day, and I am completely recovered from bringing him into the world."

"Ah, last spring—" he shook his head. "That Olden boy, Barry, wasn't it? Is that the reason he—but I won't speak ill of the dead. If he were alive I'd surely get these hands," he held up those two powerful paws, "around his neck and choke the truth out of him."

"About Barry, Dad, I will give you neither yea nor nay," she said, her own anger rising. *Be careful, Marcy,* she told herself.

He banged a closed fist into an open palm. "No? Then was it the Costain lad, who used to lallygag around you like a dying duck in a thunderstorm? I know he was in New York on business last October. 'Tis but a hop and a skip from Boston."

His statement shocked Marcy into silence. Paul in New York, and making no effort to call either her or Patsy? In her new knowledge of the man, she could not doubt it. At least she could answer her father this time with the unguarded truth. She said, "Daddy, I swear by the memory of my sainted mother that I have not seen Paul Costain for two whole years."

"Dammit then, I suppose it was one of those highbrow professors at your college. But no matter. I hope you realize what this bold stand of yours means, that it will raise pure unadulterated hell among your friends and relatives. My daughter with a new baby and no husband—"

"What do I care what they think, or say?" Marcy cried. "I never cared anything for society anyhow. Daddy, if you are

ashamed of me, if I'm a burden, I'll take Tommy and get out. The last thing I want to do is hurt you."

"No, no, darlin'!" he said quickly. "Both of you are welcome here for always. It's only that—"

She interrupted. "I'm sure I can stand the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, if you can. I love you, Daddy."

He sighed, looking down at the floor. At last he looked at her squarely. Like the sun breaking through clouds, the grin so familiar and beloved by Marcy broke over his face. "All right. I love you too, mavourneen, and if you think it best to keep your own counsel in this affair, you may. I'm still uncomfortable about you bringing your wood's colt into our respectable house, but I expect I'll get used to it." He stood up. "And speaking of that broth of a boy, I'll do what I can to shield him from the world. In fact I am about to go up yon stairs and have a proper look at this young grandson of mine."

Marcy and Dora listened to the sound of his steps, up the stairs, and receding down the hall. Dora sighed deeply. "Things were growing a bit warm, dear."

"Pretty dicey for a minute," Marcy admitted. "I came near losing my temper with that stubborn Ulsterman."

"You did that," Dora said drily. "And a good thing you did not. Marcy, you lie very well. It's a very brave thing you are doing."

"What on earth do you mean by that, Auntie?" Marcy asked.

"This game you are playing, to protect the child, and Patsy."

"What an odd idea!" Marcy stalled. "Auntie, you're being plain absurd."

Dora shook her head. "I can use the deductive method as well as my favorite detective, Sherlock Holmes, so don't try to bamboozle me, Marceline Tarrant. This child never came from your womb. He's Patsy's, isn't he? In spite of your father's guess about poor Barry Olden, this is a May baby, only a few weeks old. Yet you are in radiant health, and there never was any intimation of poor health in any of your letters. Yet Patsy was always whining about her state, missing classes, going to the doctor. Patsy and Lisa Gouch ran wild all last summer, late parties, overnight cruises, and God knows what. I think even Claribel has some suspicions, and must have been relieved to have a slim and innocent Patricia join her last week."

"Auntie, you're drawing a long bow," Marcy said. "When

I saw Patsy last, she was healthy enough to take the ship to Europe."

"Peasant blood. The Laughlins used to have their offspring in the fields and go back to hoeing," Dora said tersely. "No, Tommy is Patsy's child, not yours. I can't fathom all your reasons for claiming him, for taking the brunt of spite and gossip, but knowing you, I'm sure you know what you are doing. And I love you for it. You're strong. Patsy is not."

She stood up, smoothing her dress down on her excellent figure. Sympathy in her voice, she said, "My dear, be assured our talk will go no further than this room. You've kept my secrets, I'll keep yours. As to the father, I could make a most practical guess. By a few discreet inquiries—"

"Don't meddle, Auntie," Marcy said sharply. "Let Patsy and Claribel alone in their quest to collar a count or a baronet. Stay out of this affair, for God's sake—and mine."

"All right, I'll keep my long nose out of it. Now if you'll have Logan Cresap drive me home, I'll settle down with Holmes and Watson to unravel the puzzles and foibles of this world, without disturbing the tranquility of my own family."

After her aunt had gone, Marcy was still shaken by Dora's astuteness. Thank God it was Dora, she thought. She was discreet, and dependable, and she loved Marcy. Marcy would be able to keep on protecting little Tommy, and foolish Patsy, and that cad, Paul Costain. Though why she should protect him, she was afraid she'd never know.

As the June days tumbled past, Marcy became involved more and more deeply in the booming business that was Tarrant Motors. Working long hours, hard hours, she enjoyed every minute of each day. She made free time to love and attend her infant son, who had become more and more established in her mind as her own with each passing day. It was now inconceivable to her that the baby could have sprung from any loins but hers. His pedigree would be Tarrant, his ancestry her ancestry. Tommy was *her* son, and a person in his own right.

The stability of her new life was shaken one July day. She was at lunch with her uncle, Chalmers Laughlin, and Dominic Renfrow. They discussed a new idea of Dom's, to finance the purchase of new units by bank loans against the new cars themselves until sold, rather than from the working capital of the firm. "Your bank will make money," Dom explained, "and the loan is secure. For our part we won't have large sums of money tied up in floor inventory."

Cham Laughlin seemed quite receptive of the idea. He

told them that a version of this plan was used by other business ventures successfully. He was sure his board of directors would vote favorably on extending this new line of credit. Her uncle, Marcy knew, had become quite a motoring enthusiast, which made her task and Dom's much easier.

When Cham Laughlin had left for the bank, Dom told Marcy, "I should have sprung it on him that Costain Brothers is handling some paper like that. It would have shaken him up. But I'm sure he's sold on our plan. Say, Marcy, it's grand to have you back. I tell your dad, one smile from you will melt the flinty heart of the worst miser among the San Francisco fraternity."

"Are my business assets your only reason for being happy I'm back?" Marcy teased.

"My God, Marcy, don't say that! I'm still in love with you and I'll always be. Never forget that." He paused, looking at her solemnly, then a grin lit his face. "But I've made a discovery. It's possible for a man to love two women devotedly at the same time."

"Well, I like that!" Marcy said in mock indignation. "You fickle men, you can't be trusted. Who is my rival?"

"She's a darling. Her name is Rita Provence. She's a nurse at St. Vincent's. I met her there when my Pope-Winston turned on me and broke my arm. A couple months ago I talked her into accepting my ring. We'll be married in the fall."

"Dom, I think that's wonderful," Marcy said sincerely. She leaned over and brushed his cheek with her lips. "I know you'll be very happy. She must be a fine person. What's that about your arm? Daddy had a line about it in one of his letters."

"My own fault, Marce. Forgot to retard the spark. When I cranked her, she backfired and the crank broke my wrist as slick as a whistle. It's all healed now, though I know it's there when the weather changes."

"Those accidents keep happening," Marcy said. "There are a hundred inventors at work on self-cranking devices. I wish one of them would come up with something that worked. We've got to have that, Dom, to crack the women's market."

"That's exactly it," Dom said, frowning. "Maybe if we offered a prize—no, the guy who cracks it will get his reward in full measure and running over. Marce, you don't mind if I run? Rita's on the afternoon shift, and I promised to drive

her to St. Vincent's. On this shift it's about the only time I get to see her."

"Since I used up your lunch hour and more on business, go right ahead. And Dom, tell Rita you have my blessing and that I'm anxious to meet her. I'll stay and finish my coffee."

The noon crowd at De Silva's had thinned out by now. Marcy sat sipping her excellent coffee, and studying some of the figures Dom had prepared for Chalmers Laughlin. A very thorough and accurate job, she agreed. Intent on the papers before her, she sensed rather than saw someone standing beside her.

"I was sure that lovely redhead I've been admiring from afar could only be Marcy Tarrant," a man's voice said.

Startled, Marcy looked up. Her heart skipped, for the man was Paul Costain. Still handsome, still suave, the bright smile was there, the body a little heavier, Paul's curly hair receding a distinguished trifle from the temples. Not so boyish, Marcy thought. Completely sure of himself, the picture of a true aristocrat.

"Why, Paul, what a surprise!" Marcy said, extending her hand. He did not release it as he dropped into the chair beside her. "You look well," she said. "How is everything going?"

"First-rate, great, thank you, Marcy. My God, you are more beautiful than ever! You are well, I trust?"

"Fit and healthy," she told him, and was silent, leaving the initiative to him.

He hesitated, looking away. Then he met her glance squarely. "Marcy, what's this about you coming home with a baby?"

"Yes. My son, Thomas Michael Tarrant."

"Oh, the Lucy Stone bit, eh? Still using your maiden name."

She smiled gently. "It's the only name I have, Paul. You see, I don't have a husband."

Oddly, he seemed unsurprised at the statement. *Dora is not the only one who has been adding two and two,* Marcy thought. Not surprising, with the secrets he was hiding.

He said, "Well, I won't pry. You know I think you could do no wrong, no matter that—" he shook his head. "It's wonderful to have you back in San Francisco. I want to have dinner with you a few times before I go."

"You're leaving the city?"

"The firm is sending me to London next month. I'm exiled

to three years internment in Costain *Frères's* London office. I'm on orders to learn the techniques and the inner nuances of international banking."

"Well, good for you, Paul. Congratulations," she said. "I know you'll like London, you'll fit in beautifully. Why, I can picture you, in morning coat and cravat and striped trousers greeting your elite clients in the city. Or later playing the jovial host in your bachelor flat in Mayfair. Or will you be welcoming guests to an exclusive little dinner at Claridge's, only the *crème de la crème* of society, of course?"

"Marcy, you're having me on. You make me sound like a damned snob," he said defensively. "The job's mostly hard work, with very little social life, and you can bet on it. But to return to the present, how about that dinner date, Marcy? My God, do you realize it's two years since I've seen you?"

"Paul, we've grown apart, and that's how I want it to stay," she said firmly. "Anything we had in common is gone long ago. There's no point in digging up old bones, or refurbishing old regrets."

"Marcy, you're still single. You can't have forgotten those wild exciting days when we first met. Come now, don't be coy. I know you can't have lost all feeling for me."

"How like a man," Marcy said, a touch of scorn in her voice. "Friendships die, Paul. Love dies, or is murdered. Tonight when you are alone, analyze my refusal. Think of the past, if you will. If you can arrive at a single reason from my standpoint why I should go out with you, I'll be astonished. The fire burned once, but you trampled it out. There aren't any embers left to rekindle."

"I think there are some of those embers still glowing," he said, tightening his hand on hers, moving a little closer to her. "I can see it in those green eyes of yours. Come, Marcy, stop trying to josh me. When can we go to dinner?"

She pulled her hand away forcibly. "You're persistent, aren't you? Then I must be blunt. I wouldn't touch you, Paul Costain, with a ten-foot pole. A long time ago, you taught me the meaning of selfishness. You owned me then, heart and soul, and when you threw away my love, something within me died. I'm free of you now, Paul, and only an idiot falls into the same trap a second time."

"That's a hell of an indictment, Marcy," he said with a touch of anger. "I guess I had that coming, the way I let you down once, two years ago. I did treat you miserably. But I was younger then, just as you were. We were two people

just trying to find our way. Now I've grown up. Please give me another chance."

"Paul, can't you get it through your handsome head that the only feeling I have for you is indifference?" Marcy cried. She turned the knife in the wound. "You're right, I was young then. But now I've known other men, men whose briefcases you aren't man enough to carry. Write me off, Paul. Sail away to London to your job as office boy, and find yourself an acquiescent rosy-cheeked English girl to decorate your flat and pamper your male ego. I finished with you long ago and forever."

"Marcy, you can't turn me out like this," he said, turning the full force of his personality upon her. "We've been friends—and more—too long. I'll call you. We'll have dinner at the Palace, and afterwards, there's my flat on Sacramento Street—"

"How many girls have you taken there, Paul?" she asked pointedly. "Do you keep a scorecard on the wall to mark down the young virgins you have deflowered?" She stood up abruptly. She gathered her papers and thrust them into her handbag. She picked up her gloves. "Don't call me, Paul. Don't try to see me again. Keep to your foolish virgins who seduce so easily under your cheap pledges of eternal love. You've proven to be egotistical, and treacherous, and above all, a fool. Goodbye, Paul."

He stared at her, his face livid with anger. "God damn you!" he exploded. Turning on his heel, he almost ran from the restaurant.

CHAPTER XXVII

The San Francisco social world moved at a sedate pace during the summer months. Many of the prominent families had ranches or summer homes down the Peninsula or up in Marin County, and retired to them out of the stinks and noise of the city as soon as school was out. This summer of 1902 the "in" thing was to take the Grand Tour of Europe. The wealthy matrons like Claribel Laughlin sailed with their nubile daughters to visit museums, cathedrals, art galleries, and couturiers from Queenstown to Athens. Always in the back of their minds was the hope their fortunes might pry open the doors of nobility, lesser or greater, and they could return in triumph as the mother of a baroness or countess at the very least.

Even with this exodus of social talent, there was a constant interplay of galas, garden parties, coaching jaunts, and teas, to occupy the leisure of the elite who for one reason or another stayed in the area for the summer. Yet the telephone in Marcy's office in the Tarrant Building seldom rang for any reason except business. Marcy found a wry amusement in the knowledge that as the unmarried mother of a small child, she was classified in society circles as a Fallen Woman. This meant that her presence at a social function would surely contaminate the morals of the purer souls attending.

For the most part Marcy found the ostracism no more than bittersweet, for she was busy and interested in her business career. It was only when some old friend averted her head when she passed Marcy on the street, or she was left off the guest list for some charity affair in which she was interested, that Marcy felt pained.

Now and then she managed to go riding on the Laughlin estate in the Marin Hills. Her Aunt Dora often rode with her, though Marcy shocked her aunt by riding in denim pants and a boy's chambray shirt, astride like a wild Indian. Dora would be dressed fashionably in long-skirted habit, riding on an English sidesaddle.

"Frankly, I don't care any more what people say about me," Marcy told her, swinging up into a Western stock

saddle. "You forget, dear Auntie, that I'm already an abandoned woman, beyond the pale. So I'm expected to do mad, mad things, and I'm being obliging."

Her aunt laughed. "Marcy, you're incorrigible, but darn it, I wish I had your nerve."

As they rode off in a blaze of sunshine up the swell of the brown hills, Marcy asked, "What do you hear from the Chevalier?"

"A fine long letter yesterday," Dora said. Marcy saw her aunt's eyes grow distant and limpid. "It told all the latest news of Chateau Orient, a new colt born, roof tiles blown off by a storm, a better well is being drilled. And oh yes, *Maman* finally permitted Jacques to buy a Renault cabriolet for use at the chateau. Whereupon, Robert says, the head coachman eloped with the upstairs maid. The two fled the country, the coachman vowing he would *jamais, jamais* have anything to do with that satanic machine."

"A casualty of the motor age," Marcy said, chuckling. "A great many California coachmen are about to become similar casualties at the hands of Tarrant Motors, though the poor men don't know it yet. Auntie, did the Chevalier say anything—well, personal?"

Dora Laughlin gave her niece an enigmatic smile. "Just his usual protestations of undying affection, a bit fulsome in the French manner. But there was one thing. Perhaps I'm reading between the lines, Marcy; Robert had sided with Jacques in the purchase of the Renault, and *Maman* didn't like that. She and Robert must have had some bitter words, and she put him in his place as if he were a paid servant. 'And very poorly paid,' Robert added. I think *Maman* has pushed him near the breaking point."

A low rail fence barred their way, and with a touch of her crop, Marcy sent her horse into a canter. He went up and over in a clean jump. Dora's mare followed, taking Dora over the fence quite casually.

Riding side by side again, Marcy said, "Auntie, don't you think it's time to strike the iron? The Chevalier is a proud man, and I'd guess he's about fed up. It might be the time to suggest very tactfully that he would love California, that there are many opportunities here for a man of his abilities, and if it is a question of money you would be pleased to advance him a loan. Tell him the wineries are begging for oenologists."

"I had already decided to do just that, and pray for the best," Dora said. "I just hope he comes. Robert is such a gentleman, and the only man I ever—" she stopped in con-

fusion, and Marcy guessed that her aunt was blushing. Dora leaned closer. "Marcy, I confess that I'm in love with that Frenchman. He taught me that there's more to life than being Cham Laughlin's old-maid sister. You may not think this ladylike, but dammit, I want a man! And I don't know any man I need as much as Robert Duplessis, the Chevalier Moreau."

"Good for you, Auntie!" Marcy applauded. "You must get that letter off tomorrow."

In April Marcy passed her twenty-first birthday, and became legally the vice-president of Tarrant Motors Corporation. The position was not a sinecure, for the automobile business was expanding very fast, just as Marcy had predicted two years before. Tarrant's had the agency for the curved-dash Oldsmobile, the first car to be mass-produced in America. The price was very attractive, the car was reliable, so it was selling, as Tom Tarrant said, "like ice-cream cones at the State Fair on an August afternoon." And they were expecting soon their first deliveries of the Saxon-Benz, and later the Ferroni Vinca, both beautifully designed and horribly expensive. They hoped there were enough rich enthusiasts to buy all Tarrant's could obtain.

One September day, Tom Tarrant called a meeting in his office. Besides Tarrant and Marcy, there were Cal Plumb, the shop foreman, Dom Renfrow, Sandy Woodworth, the Tarrant counsel, and Beulah Danaher, the firm's efficient middle-aged secretary.

"Strategy, friends," Tarrant told them. "Things are moving so fast we'd better plot our course or we'll hit a reef."

So for two hours they discussed problems of financing, of deferred payments, the disposal of cars which they were accepting as trade-ins, matters of insurance, and the unsolved need for a cheap, stripped-down car. Tom Tarrant told of his interest in trucks for heavy hauling, and his lack of success in finding a well-designed unit. "The damn things are built so heavy they're loaded when they're empty," he grumbled.

"It will come, Daddy," Marcy said. "Sandy, I want you to prepare an iron-clad purchase contract we can use for every sale. We must limit our liability to the things which we are responsible for, and not damage caused by some irresponsible customer."

"My dear Marcy, there's no such thing as an iron-clad contract," the lawyer said. "But I think I can work up one that will keep you out of damage suits, for the most part. And a different contract for cars bought on time payments."

"When we start moving vehicles in quantity, we're going

to advertise, advertise, advertise, as Charles Rolls advised," Marcy said. "And I'm going to begin training a good sales force, three or perhaps four men by next year. I've worked out a plan to pay them a base salary, a discount on their own cars, and a commission on each car sold, new or used. I'm going to insist on good men, real go-getters, but at the same time men who will be a credit to the reputation of Tarrant Motors."

At the end of the meeting, Tom Tarrant said, "You've got this all down, Beulah, I see. Now, as officers of the company, Marcy and Dom and Beulah and I have a little surprise for you. We've voted ten shares of Tarrant Motors stock to you, Cal, and to you, Sandy. And we're setting aside ten shares for Marcy's new head salesman, as soon as he has proven his ability. I'm sure with a piece of the business you'll all work your tails off for the success of the business."

As the meeting was breaking up, Tom Tarrant raised a hand. "Nearly forgot. Our first Ferroni Vinca is being unloaded today from an Italian freighter. Cal, we want you to go down and service her, get her running, and drive her here. Marcy, you can release your newspaper ads for tomorrow. Open-house at Tarrant's."

"Come and see the beautiful new Vinca, a triumph of Italian engineering genius," Marcy proclaimed. "Refreshments, flowers for the ladies, toy balloons for the children. We want you to see this phenomenal new motor car. Oh, I wish Carlo could have been here to see our sales campaign."

"It wouldn't have hurt to have a handsome, real live Italian count to show the car off, at that," Dom Renfrow said. "What kept him from coming, Marcy?"

"A number of things. Italy is going through a period of political and labor unrest," Marcy said. "He has production problems, too. I would guess the poor man is working about sixteen hours a day. And to be frank, I don't think he can afford the trip."

"You told him Tarrant's would pay his expenses? As Dom says, he'd sell Vincas like hotcakes," Tom Tarrant said.

"I wrote that, but he turned me down," Marcy said. "It smacked too much of charity for his sense of pride to accept."

"Poor but proud, eh?" Sandy Woodworth said. "Well, by all accounts he makes a fine automobile. I'm anxious to see it."

When Cal Plumb drove the Vinca touring car onto the sales floor that afternoon, all the Tarrant crew gathered around. Marcy looked the car over with interest and admira-

tion. She saw that it was much advanced over the two-seater Carlo had driven in the great Luton-Peterborough road race. It was rich with coat after coat of baked-on enamel. The nickeled parts gleamed like silver, the brass parts like gold. The wheels were heavy-duty, and equipped with the Vinca detachable rims. The Michelin tires were wider, with more surface on the road, and had a patterned diamond tread for traction.

Marcy got behind the wheel, which was on the left side, as she had specified to Carlo, since American traffic used the right-hand side of the road. The gear-shift lever was handy to the right hand, the throttle was controlled by a foot pedal. The clutch and brake pedals were easily accessible, and the driver's seat was adjustable so even a small woman could drive the car. The dials of heat indicator, oil pressure gauge, and ammeter were set into the dashboard. Marcy was greatly pleased to see that Carlo had incorporated electric head and tail lamps, instead of the clumsy acetylene lamps still widely used on the Continent.

She leaned back in the seat, finding the red leather seats well made and comfortable. She stepped down and walked around the car, her admiration growing. This car, she thought, had lost its last derivation from the carriage. Here was a new breed, a machine with a bright promise for the future. Carlo Ferroni was not only a gentleman and an engineer. He owned a touch of genius. This was a masterpiece in wood and steel, brass and leather. Carlo was an artist, she thought. She felt an intense rapport with him. If he were only here to share this moment with her.

"What figure should I fill in on my check?" a man's voice asked, breaking into her reverie. She turned, to find her uncle, Chalmers Laughlin, standing with checkbook in one hand, Waterman in the other. There was a smile on his usually austere face that was almost a grin. "Isn't she a beautiful thing?" he asked, with a touch of awe. "Dom called me so I could get a good look at her before the crowds come tomorrow. I never thought a piece of machinery could be a work of art. Marcy, she has such a look of power, and the grace of an African gazelle. I must have her, I simply must."

"The Vinca doesn't come cheap, Uncle Cham," Marcy said.

"Of course not! Anyone can see that many hours of fine work and the best of material went into her. Such a thing of beauty—Marcy, if Claribel and Patricia can go gallivanting all over Europe, blowing money on clothes and antiques and God only knows what all, don't you think it should be my

privilege to ante up a few spondulix for myself?" He leaned close and said in a voice soft with emotion, a sentiment Marcy had never heard from her staid, reserved uncle: "Marcy, please sell me this car. I tell you true, I have never in all my life wanted anything so much as I want this Vinca."

Marcy was touched. "If you'll let us keep her until after the showing, she's yours, Uncle Cham. You'll need a while for Cal Plumb to teach you how to drive her, anyhow."

"She's mine, then," he said in satisfaction. He reached out and patted the polished hood as one would caress a pet animal. "Won't Claribel and Patsy be surprised when they get home!"

"They surely will," Marcy said, imagining the mixed feelings of Claribel and the delight of Patsy. "This car will bring all of you a new kind of pleasure."

"I'm sure she will. I've been growing a bit stuffy of late."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

Marcy Tarrant and her small son Tommy were alone in the big house on Franklin Street in the waning hours of 1904. Her father had gone, with more than a little reluctance, to a gathering of automobile dealers in Seattle. Since some crucial problems of the burgeoning industry would be discussed, Marcy had insisted that he go, even though it was the holiday season.

She was alone by choice. She could have accepted the invitation of any one of several admirers whom she dated on occasion, relationships enjoyable but quite platonic on her part. She might have been escorted to the Nautilus Ball by one of them, a privilege extended to every Nautilus Maiden in perpetuity. She had no desire to go. That Ball held too many bitter memories for her, and she was sure she would break into tears when Gus Thalberg's orchestra struck up "After the Ball."

Dom Renfrow and his sweet wife Rita had asked Marcy to celebrate the New Year with them, but this too she had passed by. The Chalmers Laughlins, with their daughter Patsy and her new husband, Stanley Holloman, were at the Nautilus Ball, Marcy knew. And Marcy would have been welcome at Napa, where her Aunt Dora, Mrs. Robert Duplessis, lived with her husband and infant daughter. The Chevalier was oenologist and viticulturist for one of the larger California wineries.

Yet Marcy was perfectly content, standing at the bay window of her home, looking out at the lights of Nob Hill, and to the south the brightness of the business district and the shimmering reflections in the dark water of the Bay beyond. Far across the water, undimmed this last night of 1904 by mist, the lights of Alameda and Oakland winked at her, and lights starred the Berkeley hills beyond.

I suppose I'm something of a solitary soul, Marcy thought, though she was neither lonely nor sad tonight. Another year was ending, but it had been a happy and fruitful one. Little Tommy, growing like a weed, was unbelievably two and a half, and soon would become Young Tom. She knew she must

listen for a whimper from the nursery. He had had some little sniffles this afternoon. She hoped he wasn't catching a cold.

I wonder how Mary and Lulu are doing at the annual brawl of the Devonshire Club. This the one night in the year when the two aging spinsters "let go all holts," as Tom Tarrant put it. Last year Mary had brought Lulu home as drunk as a Belfast tinker, and not in much better condition herself. Marcy chuckled. Tonight they'd fall off the water wagon again, and be repentant for weeks for their unladylike behavior. But Marcy believed it did them good, a devilish woman-of-the-world feeling quite delicious, something to hold close in those spinster bosoms for the rest of the year.

Looking east across Franklin, beyond Van Ness, beyond Polk, Marcy let her thoughts drift back and back—to that Nautilus Ball at the turn of the century, to that New Year's in New York with poor Barry Olden, to the pleasant family gathering with Evelyn Harkins and all her kin in Syracuse. Dear Evelyn. Hadn't they had fun last summer when Evelyn had visited in San Francisco? Then Marcy and her father, leaving the baby at home, had celebrated New Year's last year at Napa, with Aunt Dora, in her brand-new house with her husband, Robert Duplessis, no longer the Chevalier Moreau except by courtesy, for he had already filed first papers for American citizenship. A happy and busy man of wine, Duplessis had changed greatly. In the joy of his marriage, both he and Dora seemed to grow younger, sparkling with the love of life and of each other. That day Dora had whispered to Marcy that she was pregnant. Nor was this a false alarm, for Dora had given birth just three months ago to a lovely, healthy girl.

Marcy's thoughts turned to Patsy. She wondered if her cousin was now as cynical about the Nautilus Ball as she herself was. Probably not, for the Stan Hollomans were active in San Francisco society, Patsy quite the butterfly, proud of her handsome dentist husband. The Hollomans were pillars of the Friday Night Cotillion Club, ruled by Ned Greenaway with an iron hand. Greenaway had established himself as the arbiter of society, deferring only to Cleopatra Costain. Marcy smiled, speculating whether Mrs. Costain, still the empress of the Nautilus Ball, was wearing that God-awful diamond stomacher tonight. After all, her son Paul was in London, and could not object, and the Costain daughters, mousy silent girls, would not dare offer gratuitous advice to their mother. *Though no relation, she's like* Maman, Marcy thought.

The thought of Paul brought out that picture of him from that dark corner of the mind one reserves for unpleasant memories one can never quite forget. Marcy had no intention of seeing Paul when she took her extended business trip to Europe this coming summer. If she did happen to meet him, would she enjoy the encounter? She shook her head, recalling the bitter exchange in the restaurant that first summer she had returned. She had not seen Paul since. She had heard indirectly that he was living it up in London. He would, she thought scornfully.

She remembered now standing at a window with Barry Olden, looking out at the lights of New York. Poor Barry, so hungry for love, so frustrated, so marked for tragedy even on that night.

She sighed. Barry had been so wretched, so full of contradictions, so woeful with love unrequited. She had learned from him the tragic consequences of abandonment, and the vow she had made on that lonely hill above the quarry she had kept. It had been a large factor in her claiming that man-child of hers, who would never know the bitterness of being unloved if she could prevent it. The soft delight of her love for her son flooded joyously over her.

Other thoughts, other scenes. She smiled rather wryly at the memory of her surrenders to that satisfying lover, Jacques Demaret. Knowing she was reliving sexual fantasies, still she remembered clearly the joys of going to bed with Jacques. The man was so handsome, so expert, so ingratiating. She reflected, *He brought me out of myself to a peak of physical pleasure that I'll never forget.* She was sure that to him it was a mere physical act, the kind of cathartic a man takes now and then when his loins ache for a woman. But in true Gallic fashion, Jacques made an enjoyable game of it. Her acquiescence the second time, of course, was game-playing too. A winning game, for it got Carlo the loan for his factory.

Ah, Jacques, she told him silently. *I've had no word from you, nor expected it. But you are certainly one man I will see on my trip, and I know you will try gallantly to seduce me.* Whether he would succeed or not was another story. *You are not, Jacques, the man I'm hungry to see, to have him hold me in his arms.*

Carlo, Carlo, you sweet and gentle man! she thought. *You don't know it, but I'd leap naked into bed with you at the crook of your finger. Please come to California, Carlo. Let the double-damned auto business take care of itself, and come to me.* Four years since she'd seen him, and over those four

years she'd longed more and more for him. She read his long letters over and over. She shared his troubles, laughed at his anecdotes, got angry at the stupidity of workmen and officials.

In all those years, Carlo, I haven't known a man, she confessed. Plenty of opportunity, for a pretty woman with an illegitimate child was considered fair game by roving roués and fun-loving bachelors. They'd even bought expensive cars from her, thinking that might toll her into their lonely beds. She'd become quite expert in fending them off.

She smiled at the thought of Carlo, taking the time from his heavy schedule at his factory to write long letters to her. Carlo was not a man of complaint, but she knew him well enough by now to read between the lines the fact that Italy was in deep trouble. Premier Giolitti was trying to walk a chalkline between the Riformisti and the Socialists. Now the rise of the Syndicalists had brought more trouble, culminating in a general strike in September. Labor stoppages were costing Carlo production, and money losses.

In a burst of anger quite uncharacteristic, he had written recently:

> They're bleeding me white. My people, the very people I have trained for my work, men that I have fed from my own meager pocket when they were starving, they shrug their shoulders and say, 'Well, this is the new revolution. From now on you employers won't be able to suck the lifeblood of the working class.' What nonsense!

He added in this October letter:

> In spite of them I have put on the ship at Genoa your two runabouts, your limousines, and your touring car, consigned to Tarrant Motors. Dearest Marcy, you will be pleased with my improvements. More the power, more the smooth, more fine the finish. My new shock absorbers, so the comfort is remarkable. And the body, smooth, sleek, like the body of a beautiful woman without her clothes on. Next shipment I must increase the price, from all the troubles. But not this time, because every night I go in the little chapel. I fall to my knees and make the sign of the cross and I pray "God bless Tarrant Motors and my dearest Marcy."

And I'm sure he does just that, Marcy thought, smiling. *I can hardly wait for August when I'll see that dear man.* Maybe she could help solve some of his problems, lighten the

pressure he was working under. She had a problem too—if the new car of Charles Rolls was all it was cracked up to be, she'd wanted to handle it here. But they couldn't carry three lines of expensive machines. If they picked up the Rolls car, it could mean dropping Prince Rudolph's Saxon-Benz, or Carlo's Vinca. *What an awful thought,* she mused. *I guess I'll just have to cross that bridge when I come to it.*

She hated to leave little Tommy for such a long time, but her trip was imperative, and Tommy would be in good hands. Mary and Lulu and Tough Tom Tarrant would spoil the bonny child unmercifully while she was gone. But she could recover that ground and do her own spoiling when she came home.

Thomas Michael was so sunny, so intelligent, so charming that everyone loved him. Claribel and Cham had long since forgotten the fact of the boy's illegitimacy, and doted on him. Perhaps this had some basis in Patsy's childlessness. Marcy sometimes wondered if her cousin's traumatic experience with Paul Costain might not be at the root of her sterility.

So times change, Marcy thought. The little bundle she took from the Moorhaven Clinic now talked a blue streak. He rode his tricycle with daring and impunity, he asked interminable questions, and knew the names of all the parts of an automobile. It made her go all weak inside when she thought of how much she loved him, and she knew her father felt the same way.

The first chime of bells, the first hoot of whistles, brought her out of her reverie. The grandfather clock in the parlor clicked to clear its throat, then in chimes counted off the strokes of midnight, putting behind Marcy forever the year of 1904.

Picking up a wrap, Marcy opened the front door and went out on the porch in the crisp clean air. Along East Street the sirens of the ships began to moan, and the factory whistles to hoot mournfully. Church bells clanged, and from Chinatown came the snap and boom of firecrackers. From near the Ferry Building a rocket went up, walking high into the night on a tail of fiery sparks. It exploded in a shower of light, red and blue and green which drifted down toward the reflection in the water, and was gone. *Somewhere,* Marcy thought, *there is a spent stick falling, left useless after its one moment of glory.*

Touched by a tendril of sadness as well as a finger of hope, Marcy shivered. *I really don't want to know what this year holds,* she thought. She knew there would be joy and laughter and fine things, but some, maybe those close to

her, would know tragedy and failure, both the good and the bad, the price of life man purchased for himself in Eden when the world was young.

As the tumult and the echoes died away into the shadows, Marcy drew her cloak closer around her shoulders and went into the house. She was amused at herself, tempted to so much philosophy at the thought of a year now gone from her young life. It was true enough, though, she knew. They'd be touched by love and hate, by tragedy and comedy, profit and losses. She was prepared to meet them. She was not the naïve little girl who was a Nautilus Maiden five years before. The world had taught her a thing or two, and she had the scars to prove it. The girl she was then was now a woman.

Quite wide awake, she knew she wouldn't go to sleep if she went to bed. She went into the parlor, and with the poker prodded the fire in the fireplace into life. She settled herself in comfort in her father's easy chair, taking pleasure in the pictures her imagination conjured up in the leaping flames.

Her ear caught the slight scuff on the parquetry floor behind her, and she turned just in time to brace herself for the impact of a small, tousled figure in pajamas. She gathered her son into her arms. Tommy said, "Mommy, I got lonesome. Where's Grampa? Where's Lulu?"

"Grampa's in Seattle on business, remember? And Lulu has gone to a party with Mary," Marcy said, smoothing the dark curly hair back from his forehead. The brow was cool to her touch, and she thought, *No fever, thank God.* She took her handkerchief and helped him blow his runny nose. Then she hugged him tight, and rocked him. The sense of love that enfolded her was almost overpowering.

Snuggling against her breast, he said sleepily, "Mommy, you'll love me forever and tomorrow too, won't you?"

Her arm tightened around him. "Much and much, darling, and forever and a day, including tomorrow."

That tomorrow, and the weeks and months that followed, found Marcy and her father busy on the itinerary of her coming trip, including tickets, reservations, business appointments. "I'm wishin' I could go with you, mavourneen," her father said. "But as you well know, it's impossible, the way things are jumping here. And we've got to keep up with what they're doing over there, plus closing the deal with young Rolls. And setting up our line of credit, and the dozen other things you must do. You have no doubts about

handling those matters by yourself? Not that I question it, but some of those old fossils don't care to deal with a woman."

"I can hold my own, Dad," Marcy assured him. "It's sometimes an advantage in dealing with that kind—being a woman, I mean. A pat on the cheek, and a warm smile, and—Dad, as we mentioned, I hope to stop in Indianapolis and Detroit on my way back. I especially want to see Mr. Ford and talk to him. He's the same kind of genius as Carlo Ferroni."

Carlo Ferroni wrote of his delight that Marcy would be visiting him in Italy.

> Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see my dear Marceline again, after so long. You will be astonished at the fine factory we have made in Novara, though I have sorrow for all our troubles with politics and with labor. But no matter, I have one great surprise for you, Marcy. But you must be in Novara by August fifteenth at the very latest. Until that day I will try to curb my impatience, which will not be an easy task, dear Marcy.

What can his surprise be? Marcy wondered. Then a dismaying notion struck her. Had he acquired a fiancèe, or a bride? She bit her lip, startled that the possibility so unnerved her, when she had known this man so briefly but liked and admired him so greatly. *It could be,* Marcy admitted. *Carlo is in need of love and affection as much as the next man, perhaps more, with all his problems.* But she hoped the surprise was something else.

At last it was May, filled with all the lovely sights and sounds of spring. On clement days the dark waters of the Bay were dotted with the white wings of sailboats. Along the Marin Hills, and the length of the Peninsula, the grasses were lush and green, not yet turned to the gold of summer. Like England in April, Lulu Leghorn claimed. Marcy's arrangements were complete, including her rendezvous in New York with Evelyn Harkins. Evelyn would sail with her on the Cunard liner *Carmania,* to spend the summer studying English and Scottish porcelain at the University of Dundee.

A week before her departure, Marcy was doing some tasks at home when she had an unexpected visit from Claribel Laughlin. Noticing that her aunt seemed somewhat distraught, Marcy made her comfortable and rang for tea.

When Mary Tupper had brought the tea service and gone, Marcy poured for herself and her aunt. They sipped their tea, and made small talk about the weather, and the state of Claribel's health, which was good except for her constant fight about avoirdupois, evidently a losing one.

Claribel put down her cup, shifting her ample fundament in her chair. "So you're going to Europe," she said.

"I'm leaving next week, to be gone all summer," Marcy said. "I'll be back in September. I have to settle some important business matters over there for the firm."

"You've seen the Louvre? Oh yes, of course. Patsy and I—there's the most darling *pension* at Vivry. But I didn't come to bandy travel notes, so I'll get straight to the point."

"I wish you would," Marcy said.

Her aunt drew a deep breath and looked squarely at Marcy. "Marceline, I've talked this over with the family, Cham and Patsy and her husband. There's no use arguing, our minds are made up. We're going to take our boy."

To Marcy her aunt's statement had the impact of a physical blow. She stammered "You—you what?"

"We are going to take little Thomas Michael Tarrant," her aunt said firmly. "He's our own child, and since Stanley and Patricia have none of their own, he'll have a father. He'll be raised in the proper atmosphere, with all the advantages. Stanley loves children. Of course, you will be allowed to visit him often."

Horrified, Marcy asked, "Aunt Claribel, are you out of your mind? Tommy is *my* son. He's a Tarrant, and he's going to grow up a Tarrant. What in God's name gave you the insane idea that you have any claim to him?"

Claribel's face grew pink. Marcy could see that her aunt was exasperated by Marcy's resistance to such a reasonable demand. She said, "Marceline, we know that Tommy is Patsy's natural child, not yours. Since it is now apparent that my daughter and Stanley cannot have children, we need her son to carry on our family line. Cham and I have been deeply saddened by the lack of grandchildren. This will correct the situation."

"Claribel, I have never heard of such a piece of effrontery in my whole life!" Marcy exploded. "What earthly reason can you advance for stealing my child?"

"Patsy has confessed the entire hoax to me, and we've been debating the matter," Claribel said. "So now that you are going away, leaving the child alone for more than three months, it is an ideal time for us to take him. We will have

him settled in with Patricia and Stanley long before you come home."

Marcy's first shock was abating. Now anger began to stir at her aunt's smug assurance. "Then Patsy is in on this—this farce?" she demanded.

"Wel-l-ll, yes. She has confessed everything to me, except the name of the father. I gather that the man is well-bred and comes from an important family, however. So Marcy, the Hollomans are hungry for their child, so you may as well bow to the inevitable. I'll begin the arrangements."

"You'll do no such damned thing!" Marcy cried. "My Tommy is three years old. He loves his mother and his grandpa and his home. Under no conceivable circumstances will I turn Tommy over to you or the Hollomans or anyone else in this world."

Claribel drew herself up, her bosom swelling like that of a pouter pigeon. Her face was flushed and stormy as she said, "Then I hope you are prepared to face legal action. We'll get a court order and take the boy from you. We may start criminal action against you as well."

Marcy laughed without amusement. "Claribel, you're going to play hell, aren't you? Listen to me. You try that, and I'll rip you up one side and down the other. Only the rottenest of shyster lawyers would take on your kind of case, where the record is official and entirely plain. It says Tommy is *my* son. I'll stand behind the record, and dare you to prove otherwise."

"I'll see that this hoax is dismantled, this tissue of lies exposed!"

Marcy shook her head. "Claribel, be sensible. It is on record that Thomas Michael Tarrant was born in May, 1902, at the Moorhaven Clinic in Boston, Massachusetts, to Marceline Norah Tarrant. The hospital bill was paid with a check from Marceline Tarrant, drawn on the Beacon Trust of Boston. And every moment since his birth, Thomas Michael Tarrant has remained in the sole custody of his mother, Marceline."

"Oh, pshaw! I don't know what hanky-panky you worked to fake those papers, nor do I care. I'm hiring a detective firm and they'll ferret out the facts. They'll find witnesses in Boston who will swear it was Patsy who was pregnant and gave birth, not you. Her physician, others, will testify to her pregnancy and her confinement at Moorhaven."

"Her doctor, Dr. Warner, died in Montana a year ago, Evelyn Harkins wrote me. So that lead will get you no-

where," Marcy said with satisfaction. "As for the people at Moorhaven, help comes and goes in such places. Moreover, they handle so many births every year none of them will remember an individual case three years back. So they'll stand on their record. Come, Auntie, don't do anything silly."

"Silly, am I? I do not feel it silly to want my own grandchild," Claribel said curtly. She picked up her purse and gloves. "And I—we—intend to have him. The child needs the loving care of his real mother and her family. So unless you want a court battle with all its nasty publicity, let us have him. Otherwise you will go through a humiliating and costly ordeal, my sweet niece."

"And what of Patsy's good name?" Marcy asked coldly.

Her aunt hesitated. "We're prepared to pay that price. We'll show it was a mere misstep of an innocent child. But you, Marceline, will be branded a kidnapper, a child-stealer, and perhaps worse."

It was time, Marcy thought, to play her trump card. "Aunt Claribel, before you drag two families through the mire of a trial, and embitter everyone including a young child, you had better think carefully. I want you, and Uncle Cham if he is a party to this ugly affair, to put a question to your daughter. Ask her about the paper she signed, releasing to me forever any and all claims to Tommy. I think Patsy is honest enough to confess the truth of that paper. If she denies it, I'll have to present the document in court, and have my lawyer seek to indict her for perjury. I'm not bluffing. I have the release, and it is very real, very final. I'm sure it will stand up in court. So when you have talked to Patsy, I'm sure you'll give up this idiocy. If you don't, the Laughlins will get badly burned."

Claribel paused, her hand on the doorknob. Frowning, her manner less certain, she said, "I don't believe you have that paper. But even if it did exist, I say the child is ours, and we're going to have him."

"Never, Claribel," Marcy said firmly. "Tommy is my son, and Satan and all his angels won't pry him away from me and Daddy. If you persist, your family will be embroiled in the most ferocious legal battle San Francisco has ever seen, and it has seen some dandies. I'll fight you until hell itself freezes over."

"You forget, my dear, that the courts always favor the true mother," Claribel said.

"Even Patsy's pretty, innocent tears won't influence the court when it comes out that she entered the house of the

baby's father, stripped, and paraded nude in his bedroom," Marcy said.

Her aunt gasped. "Where did you get that? Do you know the father?"

"Of course. And this kind of trial will make him and some other very important people very, very unhappy with the Laughlins. I would have to subpoena Tommy's father, which would bring down powerful forces in the business world against Uncle Cham in retaliation."

Her aunt stared at Marcy, tongue tip touching lips suddenly dry. "You wouldn't dare do that, Marcy, you wouldn't dare!"

"I would, and God help me, I will, dear Auntie."

Her aunt went out, and Marcy stood on the porch and watched Claribel march down the steps to the new Vinca limousine waiting at the curb. The chauffeur opened the door for Claribel and gave her a helping hand. As the car drove away, Marcy thought, *She's thirty pounds overweight, and it shows. Auntie had better lose that, and learn to keep her temper, or she'll end up with apoplexy.*

As she went into the house, Marcy was still shaken by this unexpected threat to her son. Claribel did not seem to expect my bitter opposition, she thought, nor the fact of the release Patsy had signed. That, Marcy thought, and the threat of Costain retaliation, should stop Claribel, though she was stubborn Irish, and once her foot was set in a path—Marcy asked herself, *But why, why, did my stupid cousin empty her silly little heart to her mother at this late date? Patsy had sworn secrecy "cross my heart and hope to die!"* Marcy thought she knew. Claribel had been nagging at Patsy to produce a Holloman heir, until in desperation Patsy had pleaded sterility, caused by the shattering effect of her experience with Tommy. Thank God Patsy had been bright enough to keep Paul out of it. If she had told Claribel that name, it would have been, in the words of Tom Tarrant, "All hell to pay and no pitch hot."

She went up to the nursery, trying to put aside the shadow this threat had thrown upon her coming trip. The child was deep in his afternoon nap. So handsome, so loved, she thought, as she touched gently the damp dark curls. "They'll never, never take you away from me, darling," she whispered, and tiptoed from the room.

She found Mary and Lulu in the kitchen. She said, "Girls, listen carefully. There has been a threat to our Tommy. Someone wants to take him away. It may not

amount to anything, but you must be very careful especially after I leave for Europe. Never let him out of sight of one of you. Don't allow strangers to approach him, don't let anyone come into the house on an excuse. Tell Logan to watch for prowlers. Anything you see that seems out of the way, report it to my father immediately."

"Nobody will touch that sweet child as long as I can draw breath," Lulu said indignantly. "Miss Marcy, what about your aunt and uncle? They love to take him for a ride now and then."

Marcy shook her head. "They are barred, too. Only Aunt Dora can be excepted. I know it's hard, but I have good reason. I'll tell you all about it someday. Meantime, I want you to follow my orders to the very letter."

"You can count on us girls and Logan, mum," Lulu said. "We'll guard our lad like hungry lions. Anybody that reaches a hand toward our boy is likely to lose the hand and an arm too."

There's nothing for it but to tell Daddy, Marcy thought. She put on coat and hat and walked the short distance to the Tarrant Motors building. She found her father in his office.

She sat down across from him and began telling him of her Aunt Claribel's visit, and her threat to take the child. She had hardly begun when he stopped her, and going to the office door, he closed it. He returned to his swivel chair and sat calmly, listening intently, his fingers tented in front of him. She had the feeling her father knew more than she had suspected.

When she had finished, he leaned back in his chair. He said, "Mavourneen, I've waited for you to tell me the truth for three long years, my heart sad over what seemed to be your shame. Now with this threat to our little lad, 'tis time for the truth, all of it. I must have it, and by God I will."

Marcy sighed. Then she realized that many of the reasons for secrecy were no longer valid. Passing years had smudged the edges, the scandal and reproach had been eroded long since. Patsy was married in seeming happiness. Tommy was accepted—no, adored—by her father. Marcy herself had long since put aside the social stigma of the unmarried mother. And Paul—Paul was in England, though she was still determined to conceal his part in the affair.

She said quietly, "Daddy, I think your faith in me, or your instinct, has already told you this. Tommy is not my natural son. He was born to your niece, Patsy. She didn't

want him, and I did. A certain amount of chicanery was involved, but I have him, quite legally, I think."

"So now the Laughlins and Hollomans want to take him from us, may the black curse of Cromwell be upon them!" Tom Tarrant said angrily. "Well, they'll never have him, if it takes our last dollar and our last breath. So if I'm to be your ally in this, mavourneen, I must have the whole story."

It was a long story, and complex, but she gave her father all of it, withholding only the name of Paul Costain. When she was through, her father asked, "Why, darlin'?"

"I know for a time you thought poor Barry might be the father, Daddy. Well, Barry, or his memory, was involved. I had made a vow that I would never let anyone be morally abandoned as Barry was, so when it seemed Tommy would be—besides, Tommy was such an adorable infant, my heart just went out to him. And he was blood of my blood, not far removed."

"I see," he said. "The Irish are a sentimental race, and it is their habit to reach deep into the heart. I'm not sure, mavourneen, that your maneuvers and your red herrings would satisfy a court of law. If the father would testify—"

"Only as a last resort," Marcy said quickly. "He really doesn't matter, Dad, so I won't tell you his name. He's no threat to our child. The Laughlins are."

"Come to me, daughter," he said, and drew her into his arms, hugging her tight. In a choked voice he said, "Thank you for ending the bad moments I've had in the last three years. Of course you were forgiven long since. I hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive your old dad for doubting you " He kissed her on the forehead.

Tears were in Marcy's eyes as she looked up at him. "There's nothing to forgive. Thomas Tarrant, you're such a wonderful father, you've decided all my doubts. I think now I can go to Europe without worrying about Tommy and Aunt Claribel."

"I know your conniving and your hiding of secrets was always to protect others, not yourself," he said. "Now as to the threats, I know Claribel pretty well. 'Tis my hunch she has cooked up this business all by herself. It does not sound like Cham, it does not sound like Patsy. I'm sure the woman will have second thoughts about it, now that you've stood up to her the way you did. We'll just guard our little one well, and watch for developments. If they do go to law, which I misdoubt, I'll have Sandy Woodworth on it so fast it will make their heads swim. That release: better see that it

is where Sandy and I can lay our hands on it while you're gone, just in case. Though I doubt we'll need it."

"I'll do that, Daddy," Marcy said, hugging him. "Oh, I thank God you and I are together again, without specters like a wall between us."

"Sure and it would have been better if you had come clean in the first place," he said gently. "I would have understood, darlin'."

She smiled at him, her eyes still starry with tears. In her heart she disagreed, sure that she had done right keeping Patsy's secret over the years. But she did not say so.

CHAPTER II

The Cunarder *Carmania* was not only the newest and most luxurious, but the fastest of the ocean greyhounds. The suite Marcy and Evelyn occupied was beautifully furnished and appointed. Statues, paintings and other artwork adorned the dining saloons, lounges, and the ballroom. The ship was more plush than any but the finest of hotels. In the Cunard tradition, the food was excellent, the service impeccable. Some fairly stiff Atlantic squalls somewhat hampered the deck games, shuffleboard and tennis. Still, there was good music, games and dancing every night during the passage.

It was Evelyn's first ocean voyage, and she was enjoying it immensely. "Life in Syracuse was never like this," she said. "But I tell you, Marce, I'd sure like to get used to it. The purser took me on the ship's tour, down into steerage, and that isn't a slave quarter. The stewards are spoiling me rotten. I love it. And scads of handsome young men—well, not *so* darned many, but enough to make me feel like the belle of first class."

"The men should be attentive, Ev," Marcy told her. "For you're the prettiest girl on board, and the best dancer."

"Oh, pooh!" Evelyn demurred. "I have two or three young men being very attentive, then you come into the ballroom in one of your slinky gowns, with that mop of red hair, and my conquests fade away in your direction. I'm not jealous of you, you understand, I just wish you'd get so seasick you couldn't leave our stateroom."

"I love pleasant friendly talk like that," Marcy said. "As if you were suffering from any lack of beaux! As for me, except for perhaps two men, I'd sooner settle down with a good book."

One of the two was a raw-boned, rugged Yorkshireman named Johnny Edson, the second engineer of the *Carmania.* Though he squired her now and then in off-duty hours, and they had fine talks about England and America, she learned that his life centered around the great steam turbine which drove the twin screws of the ship. The *Carmania* was, he

told her, the first big liner ever built with this revolutionary propulsion system.

"Those snortin', clankin' engines that Masefield writes poetry about, they'll soon be a thing of the past," Edson told Marcy. "Why, Miss Tarrant, I can see the day ahead when Parsons turbines like mine will be moving power for all the world."

"Even for motor cars?" Marcy teased, for she had told him of her business position, and something of the reason for this voyage.

He looked at her intently, and rubbed his chin with a callused palm. Marcy could almost hear the gears meshing in his mind. "Why, that might very well be," he said. "They must be smaller and lighter, though. New kinds of metals, not run by steam, but somehow by gas—" He looked beyond Marcy, his jaw set, the remoteness of his gaze lost in infinite distances. His lips moved silently. *He's repeating God knows what arcane formula,* Marcy told herself, yet she was not upset by it, for she knew what it was to be wrapped beyond all things mundane in the stuff of dreams.

When she had first met the other man who became something of a companion to her, it was with a startling sense of *déjà vu.* For his name was André Costain, and he had more than a trace of the looks, the coloring, of Jacques Demaret, and of Paul. As Jacques had been, André was returning to Paris from a business trip to New York. It turned out that he was of the cadet branch of the Costains. How startled he would be, Marcy thought, if he learned that my son Tommy was a distant relative of his!

"This is my first responsible trip as an agent of Costain *Frères,*" he told her. He added with a trace of bitterness, "Any office boy could have handled the business. Yet it was fine to see something of the world, and to visit your magnificent city of New York. It is so vital, so ugly and so handsome at the same time."

"Yes, it will show you marvels and misery," Marcy agreed. "Yet I love Paris, too, and of course my native San Francisco. By coincidence, I have some business to take up with your firm when I'm in Paris."

"With Costain *Frères*? Ah, then you must know Madame Demaret."

"*Maman*? She did invite me and my aunt to a weekend at Chateau Orient. We had an enjoyable time, though we did not see much of Madame. She was involved in a business transaction."

"She is all business, that lady," André said guardedly.

"I do not think she likes me very well," Marcy said. "An upstart American who might have designs on her beloved Jacques. I think the trouble lay there."

"You know Jacques, also?" he asked.

"Yes, quite well. I found him most charming."

"Poor fellow. You heard about his accident?"

Shocked, Marcy asked, "What happened to him, André?"

André gave her an enigmatic look. "A fall from a horse, it is said. He hurt his leg, he walks now with a cane. He was in hospital for some time, that was when I was brought in from our Marseilles branch to run some of *Maman's* errands."

Marcy was silent, trying to visualize that handsome, virile body twisted by injury. Finally she said, "You'll see him soon? Tell him I will meet my appointment on the date we agreed. I'm sure he'll remember me."

"Who could forget a woman so lovely, with the hair of flame?" André asked gallantly. "I'll certainly give him that message. And when you are in Paris, might I have the privilege of your company to dinner one night? Perhaps the theater?"

She put a hand on his arm. "André, I'll try to save an evening for you. It would be most enjoyable."

The more she saw of this young Frenchman, the more she liked him. There was none of the tension, the sense of passion seething underneath, that had marked both Paul and Jacques. They lacked, or had lost, that certain ingenuousness, that air of naïveté that made André so refreshing, so completely friendly. Unfortunately, the young man was subject to seasickness and on the rough days of this passage he retreated to his cabin.

But when he was able to be about, he was an admirable companion, knowledgeable, witty, interested in Marcy's world as well as his own. With him she did not have to be on her guard. He was not forever laying plans and essaying gambits which would in the end lead to "let's play games in my bed." André reminded her somewhat of Dominic Renfrow, a man who could prove a warm and valued friend, without trying to establish himself as her lover.

She and André said their goodbyes the evening before the *Carmania* reached Southampton, for they would be docking at dawn. She gave him a sweet farewell kiss, renewing her promise to try to have dinner with him in Paris, and giving him the name of her hotel there.

"When you visit the establishment of Costain *Frères* in Paris, it is not likely you will see me," André told her. "The offices of *Maman* and her son Jacques and—how do you say?—the other brass hats all look out through great windows on the Boulevard Haussman. The office of André Costain is down the hall, up two flights, and his windows look out only on an alley patrolled by mangy cats who live out of the garbage cans."

So André was not there to speed Marcy and Evelyn on their way when they left the *Carmania*. Johnny Edson came to the head of the gangplank to say goodbye to Marcy. He held her hand gently in his horny paw for a long minute, and rather inarticulately managed to tell her how much he had enjoyed her company, and especially her visits to his engine room and pressed a slip of paper with an address into her hand. With face grown pink with embarrassment over his own boldness, he fled to sanctuary in his engine room deep in the bowels of the ship.

"You've made conquests," Evelyn said as they went down the gangway to the dock. "That charming Frenchman, André Costain, and now this rugged crag of a Yorkshireman."

"He's a very intelligent and talented man," Marcy said. "But he'd never make a husband, Ev. His wife, if he marries, will always play second fiddle to that great steel hulk of a Parsons steam turbine."

"And André?" Evelyn asked pointedly.

Marcy laughed. "Oh, I'll see André in Paris," she said, and let it go at that.

The two spent an enjoyable two days exploring the sights and the stores of London. Then on a sunny English morning, the Saxon-Benz limousine of Lord Wolverton picked them up at their hotel on Regent Street. Marcy had written Kitti Howerth, the new Lady Wolverton, that she would like to bring a friend with her on her visit to Ashdown. Kitti had penned a cordial invitation to Evelyn to come along and stay until Evelyn's departure for Scotland.

Marcy was delighted when the chauffeur of the big car turned out to be Justin, from whom she had borrowed the driver's uniform for the Great Motor Race. She shook his hand and introduced him to Evelyn, while the footman Laidlaw, who was loading the baggage, no doubt wondered at the free and easy camaraderie these American ladies showed the hired help.

"It's so good to see you again, Miss Tarrant," Justin said.

Then he chuckled. "If you'll pardon the impertinence, you did make the handsomest of boys in my trousers and jacket. And you and Mr. Ferroni won the race, too."

"Didn't we have fun that day, though?" Marcy asked. He grinned, and held open the door of the shining, sleek and powerful car. "We could have taken the train to Luton, Justin."

"Oh, no, the master was sure you would prefer to ride up in our new Saxon-Benz," Justin said. "She's the very latest model, just in from Germany. Miss Tarrant, an eighty-horsepower engine—pretty near scares me."

"Eighty horsepower!" Marcy said, with a soft whistle. "She's fast, eh?"

He cranked the engine into life and got in, with Laidlaw in the seat beside him. Pulling out from the curb, he said over his shoulder, "We don't tell this around, but we've had her up to seventy, mum, on the Luton road. About the only car that can touch her is the missus' Vinca. And thisun's better on hills. Not much like that old lorry of a Mercedes we had when you were here before, eh?"

And a much improved driver, Marcy thought. Justin handled the big car with skill and confidence. He tooled it along the lovely English back roads, between the hedgerows, slowing in the narrow streets of the little villages. He ignored the speed limit when he thought it safe, and they whizzed past farm yards, scattering squawking chickens when they intruded on the motorway.

Marcy hadn't seen the latest model of Saxon-Benz, which had proven a good selling line for Tarrant Motors in spite of its extravagant price. She watched the car closely, for its performance would have a bearing on a fateful decision she soon must face. She and her father had discussed it often, and they had agreed reluctantly that Tarrant's could not afford to carry more than two de luxe lines of cars. Either the Saxon-Benz or the Vinca must go to make room for the superb car Charles Rolls was bringing to production, a car which Tarrant's wanted, and indeed was committed to.

But Carlo Ferroni had been hard put to make deliveries, handicapped by labor and political troubles, by delays in materials and shipping. At the same time, Prince Rupert delivered the units on his orders promptly and in good condition. Moreover, the Saxon-Benz was advertised widely in the motor world, while the Vinca had to rely mainly on word-of-mouth advertising, and the excellence of their cars. Much as she hated to, Marcy must get to the bottom of the

problem on this trip, so she and Tom Tarrant could decide after she came home.

She could find no fault in the way the Saxon-Benz ran, except perhaps a bit of stiffness in the springing. But that should improve with use. The car was fast, for it took less than an hour and a half to cover the fifty miles to Luton.

Marcy found her heart beating faster as the limousine turned in between the tall gateposts of Ashdown. Flowers bloomed bright along the curving drive and blazed with color in the formal gardens. Handsome shrubbery, panniered or cut in topiary shapes, stood out against the emerald carpet of lawns rolled and clipped and tended for two hundred years. Evelyn give a wordless little cry of pleasure. As the car stopped under the porte-cochere, Evelyn breathed, "Oh, Marcy, how very, very beautiful! Like a fairy tale come to life."

Laidlaw had barely opened the door of the limousine when the house doors flew wide and a sylphid in fluttering silk raced toward them, and Kitti Howerth gathered Marcy in a tight embrace.

"Oh, my American friend is here at last!" she cried. "Now I get even with you for the grand way you entertained Denis and me in San Francisco two years ago, and such wonderful food! Tell me, how is your darling little boy, Tommy?"

"He's turning into my big boy, Tommy," Marcy said.

Kitti linked arms with the two girls and led them into the entrance hall. "Such a sweet child," she said. "Your father?"

"Well, and he sends his love. How is Lady Wolverton?"

Kitti looked at her sadly. "'Ave I not yet written of it? Denis' mother, who I love very much, and admired, she die six weeks ago, very quick, very easy. Her heart, it was. She was mos' happy about me and Denis, Marcy. She say I am the one to produce a son and heir for the Wolvertons. Though not yet have I done that." She giggled. "But Denis and me, we do not stop trying!"

At dinner that night, Marcy found a much less formal atmosphere than in the days of the late Lady Wolverton. Even the dress was more casual, the table service less ornate.

Denis Howerth, looking trim and fit, though a little tired, told her, "Marcy, we are so pleased that you and your friend Evelyn could come to Ashdown. I wish there was time to inveigle you into another Peterborough race. You could drive Kitti's Vinca runabout, and I'll take the new Saxon-

Benz. I'd show you a thing or two this time—I'd leave the Madeira at home."

"You couldn't beat me and the Vinca, Madeira or no Madeira," Marcy said loyally. "But I'm afraid neither you nor I have time for it, worse luck."

"No, Charles Rolls is coming up tomorrow, as you asked. And a man may be here on a financial matter for the plant. Unless you want to postpone your trip to Paris, and Miss Harkins will put off her departure for Dundee."

"I'm afraid that's impossible, Denis," Marcy said. "I must see Charles Rolls, and there's that conference with you. I have a meeting with Costain *Frères* in Paris I must not miss, and one with Prince Rupert in Gotha. Then I'll spend some time in Novara at the Ferroni factory before I sail for home. Then there are two brothers in Munich with some ideas—no, darn it, there's not a chance. Another time, I'm afraid."

"Since Kitti—" Denis frowned pointedly in his wife's direction, "does not permit business conversation at the dinner table, will you meet me in my study afterwards? Some matters of mutual interest."

"You have go far enough, milord," Kitti said. "Business for the shop, dinner for the dinner. 'Ave I told you I return to the stage for four weeks, Marcy? Yes, in London, a revival of *Pirates*. I am sing more beautifully than ever since I marry Denis. Everybody, they applaud like the thunderstorm."

At the thought, she sprang to her feet. She was wearing a slim-cut gown of purple silk which only she would dare to wear. In it she was tall and straight, a complete breakaway from the S-curve shape recently so popular in the fashion world. In that style the bosom was thrust prominently forward, while the hips and buttocks were contoured backwards. Marcy had heard her father comment on an S-curve gown worn by her Aunt Claribel: "Humph! High behind like a jackass!" Marcy had never liked the style.

But in the more natural cut, Kitti looked lovely. She was slim enough of figure for this mode, and her fine breasts accentuated the deep decolletage, which dove to a magnificent cleavage.

Kitti struck a dramatic pose and launched *a cappella* not into a Gilbert and Sullivan aria, but an American song, "In the Good Old Summer Time." Her beautiful voice ennobled the rather trite words, soaring to the corners of the long

room, sending the sweep of golden notes through the open windows.

Laughing, Lord Wolverton reached out as she finished and caught her wrist. "Sit down, my dear, You were marvelous, even if it was not Gilbert and Sullivan."

Leaning over, she kissed him, and then sat down. "Right now, tonight, this song fits better. I learn him in Cincinnati, Ohoho, on my latest American tour. Did I not sing it well?"

"Like an angel," Denis said, squeezing her wrist.

When Marcy could stop laughing at Kitti's antics, she said, "There's an old vaudeville—music hall, that is—tag line where the comic says to the straight man, 'Vas you ever in Zinzinnati?' "

"By gum, I just betcha I vas, kid," Kitti said, in a parody of an American accent. Then she laughed her silvery laugh. "Now the curtain comes down on Kitti Carnesi, and Lady Wolverton comes onstage. You like her better, Denis?"

"I like all the women you are, baby," Denis said fondly. "I'm a lucky man to have married all of them."

After dessert and a fine brown port, Marcy asked, "Kitti, what do you hear from Carlo?"

"Ah, that cousin of mine! He is so excite that you come to see him in Novara. He says he has a fine surprise for you, but he don't say what it is."

"He told me the same thing. I'm dying to know what it is. He's not—he isn't getting married?"

Kitti snorted. "That Carlo? Faugh! He is married to the gasoline engine. A girl for him would have wheels instead of legs. He would not buy her gowns, he would give her another coat of red paint." She looked hard at Marcy. "If there was any girl, I think it would be you, Marcy. But poor Carlo, he has troubles, many troubles. His people, his machinists and mechanics, they are filled with the crazy politics. They don't work, they go on strike, carry signs, make protest speeches. Then they drink too much of the red wine so they cannot come back to work. How you make good automobiles that way?"

"How is his—er, financial situation?"

Kitti shook her head. "Not good. He must expand, so he can make more cars. He ask Costain *Frères* for another loan, and to extend the first loan. They say maybe, they think about it. They put their own man in the factory, he snoop into everything, gets in Carlo's way. That nearly drive Carlo crazy, but he don' dare say nothing, they might not give him any money."

Marcy made a mental note to put in a word with Jacques Demaret when she saw him. "I can see why he worries," she said. "And he does need more volume."

Kitti brightened. "Maybe you lend him the money, Marcy, you and your papa. If he had just a million lira—that is, let me see, one hundred thousand of your dollars."

"Heavens, Kitti, the Tarrants just don't have that kind of money," Marcy said. "Besides, all our money is tied up in our business. We're always scratching for cash. Dom Renfrow, our treasurer, calls it a 'cash flow problem.' He tells us to hang onto the dollars as long as we can and get the payments in as fast as we can. We're in a tight spot most of the time. But Kitti, how about—?" She nodded her head toward the study, where Denis and his uncle had retired for cigars and brandy before the time for the ladies to join them.

Kitti made a face and shook her head. "I let Denis tell you about it, but Luton Machine is in same pickle as your business. We must expand to make the new parts for the autos, we must borrow money, lots of money. Denis, he come home from the plant very angry, he say, 'Sweetheart, we get robbed right and left, the bankers and their interest, the toolmakers and their prices high like hell, the draymen and the railroads gouging Luton Machine.' He's like bear with sore head. He don' smile, he just worries."

"Poor man, I know how that is. What do you do for him?"

Kitti giggled. "I put on nice thin negligee, I massage his neck, I pat his cheek. Then I get him in bed and we make love like crazee. Next day, he's a new man again."

"They tell me that's an old remedy that never fails," Marcy said, laughing. "As for the bank loans, I would think with the reputation of Luton Machine, your British bankers would fall over one another trying to get the business."

Kitti's lips twisted in disdain. "The British, they are *so* conservative. Denis says they want nothing but certain investments. Consols, South African gold, Jamaican sugar. So we are turning to the French, who are more daring. We have a young man coming tomorrow from Costain *Frères* of Paris. They have the loan with my cousin Carlo, and they are into Peugot and Panhard. Denis says they like Luton Machine, and our plan to make auto parts. Much correspondence, many papers, and now the man comes from their London office to say maybe Ho Kay."

A feeling of weird disbelief touched Marcy. *It can't be!* she thought. *If it is, do I want to see him?* What made her

heart beat so fast? With all the nonchalance she could muster, she asked "Do you know the Costain man?"

"Oh, yes, he come before to inspect the factories of Denis. A handsome young man. One of the firm, a relative, I think. At least his name is Costain—Paul Costain."

Marcy did not sleep well that night. She dreaded meeting Paul tomorrow, yet she found a macabre fascination in having their paths cross again like this. She could not forget their stormy parting at De Silva's restaurant in San Francisco so long ago. Three years—and she had not heard from him since. Yet in spite of what she had said then, there was still a tiny spark deep within her for Paul, her first love. Would seeing him fan that spark again into a living flame?

She could not resolve her doubts. But she knew she must treat him as kindly as she could in any case, she thought, even if he roused neither passion nor friendship in her. To do otherwise, she realized could jeopardize Carlo, for Paul had evidently become a power in Costain *Frères*. Only one in the inner circles of the great banking firm would have been sent to talk to Lord Wolverton about a loan of the magnitude Kitti had indicated.

For some reason unknown to her, the Costains were already tightening the screws on Carlo Ferroni and the Vinca factory. Perhaps it was merely shrewd business. Perhaps, with their French investments, they were intending to eliminate an Italian competitor. Though the French were not the ones to let national pride stand in the way of a profit of several million francs.

In any case, she thought, *my dear Carlo is threatened. I must walk softly with Paul Costain not to worsen the situation*. If she could keep him only neutral, in Paris she could play her game with Jacques Demaret with a good chance of success. She'd bought time for Carlo before from Jacques. She wondered if he would again make her pay his price. Her breath came quickly at the thought of the evening on the ship, of the intimate dinner at *l'auberge* Livret and its pleasant aftermath. *Jacques knows how to raise a woman to heights of sexual delight*, she admitted. Yet did she want to go to bed with him again, no matter how desperate her cause? Was it fitting or decent for her to barter her body like—like a prostitute, even though she might enjoy it? With a sense of shame, she knew that if Carlo ever guessed at the possibility, he would lose his factory, lose everything, before he would let her do that.

CHAPTER III

Rising early, Marcy had a most satisfactory breakfast with Denis. She told him of an American insistence on uniformity of parts and accessories, of universal screw thread pitches and sizes. She broached the plan she and her father and Cal Plumb had worked out for the direct shipment of these parts from the manufacturer, eliminating the services of the car maker for repair parts or accessories.

"We know you don't want to make a different size brake shoe for Panhard and Peugot and Napier," she said. "Nor do we want them charging us two prices because their part is special. Things must be standardized, Denis, and available to us. We're a long way from the source, you know."

He nodded slowly. "We've been doing some preliminary work on this matter. We're preparing parts books on every make, and have already made a few interchangeable. You have the reports your man Plumb has prepared? Leave them with me, and I'll hit our people hard at our next meeting. The Americans are much too good customers of ours to be antagonized."

"Good. And you'll ship us parts and accessories direct?"

"We will, even if we must—what is your Yankee word?—bootleg them to you. Of course, where we supply only unfinished forgings of some part to a maker—"

"I understand, Denis, and we wouldn't want to bother with such finishing. We'll rely on the maker for that sort. But there are a good many things, especially accessories, which are quite profitable, where we intend to eliminate the middleman."

When Denis, quite pleased with their talk, had driven off to the works of Luton Machine, Marcy joined Evelyn for a stroll through the formal gardens in the summer sunshine. They were not far from the mansion house when Marcy heard the thrum of an automobile engine. She turned her attention from a magnificent topiary chanticleer and watched the approach of the car.

It came swiftly up the curving drive, a small neat runabout, yellow body trimmed in green. The driver braked smoothly

to a stop in front of the main door, with only a faint screech of brake bands, and scattering of gravel. As he turned off the engine, Marcy was sure there was only one man in England who drove so smoothly, and she hurried with Evelyn to greet Charles Stewart Rolls.

He stepped down, smiling, stripped off goggles and driving gloves, tossed them on the car seat and embraced Marcy. He kissed her soundly before he held her off at arm's length. He said admiringly, "By George, it's grand to see you again, Marcy Tarrant. You're more beautiful than ever, and that Titian hair hasn't faded. How is Tarrant Motors? Your father? Everything in San Francisco?"

"Perfectly fine when we left," Marcy said. "Charles, this is my friend Evelyn Harkins. She came over to spend the summer in Dundee and the Midlands, studying English pottery and porcelain."

"Hujjedoo, Miss Harkins," Rolls said, shaking Evelyn's hand. "Those shires are full of experts, you'll find. Am I too late for breakfast?"

"We'll ask Kitti," Marcy said, taking his arm. She was pleased that he had arrived before Paul Costain. There was no clash of personalities with this friendly engineer-turned-salesman.

"You two go ahead," Evelyn said. "You can talk to your hearts' content about your crankshafts and sparking plugs and whatever, while I return to the lovely sights and sounds and smells of the Ashdown gardens."

As Evelyn turned away, Kitti Howerth came down the stairs in a rush of trailing chiffon. She embraced Charles Rolls. "My Charlie, how wonderful to see you!" she cried. "You want breakfast? Denis is gone to the plant. He will be back soon, I think, though one never knows. Laidlaw, take Mr. Rolls's bag up to his usual room. Marcy, I have one t'ousand tbings to do today, maybe more. Will you see that my so-handsome Charlie gets his breakfast?"

Marcy did. When he had finished, they adjourned to Denis's study, a comfortable room, with leather-paneled walls, hung with hunting prints, mementos and books, papers and curios strewn about, a typical man's room.

As they sat on the chesterfield, Rolls ticked time off on his fingers. "Two—no, by George, three years since I've seen you, Marcy. What are your plans for Europe? Denis and Kitti merely told me you were coming, but they did not say why."

Briefly she outlined the proposals she had put to Denis.

Rolls nodded approval. "It makes sense, Marcy. So much sense that we've been working hard on it. We've got to standardize, simply got to. The stupidity of every car maker using all different sizes and threads and gauges—" Rolls shook his head. Then he smiled. "I may be talking against my own advantage. The new car that Fred Royce and I are building is largely hand finished, to absolutely fabulous tolerances. But then, our Rolls-Royce is not your ordinary car."

"Which is another reason I've come to Europe," Marcy said. "I know your car won a silver medal last year at the Paris Exposition. I know the motor magazines are full of more laudatory pieces and testimonials than any other car has ever won. I know that you have only one agent as yet in North America, Ketchum and Company in Ottawa. Charles, Tarrant Motors wants the West Coast dealership. We've got the facilities, the personnel, and a market so rich you wouldn't believe it unless you saw it. We'll move cars for you, and we'll provide them with first-class service. Please consider us."

Smiling, Charles Rolls rubbed his lean jaw with long strong fingers. "Sounds good to me," he said. "But I've got to have a closer look. There's a few others in the bidding, as you may have guessed. So what do you have to offer?"

Marcy took from her briefcase the papers outlining the Tarrant proposal, which she and her father had prepared with much toil and care She began going over them with Charles Rolls, pleased with the keen grasp he showed of the situation.

Two hours later she returned her own papers to her briefcase, and gave him an envelope with copies of the proposal. She looked at him, her eyes asking a silent question.

He lit a slim cigar with careful ostentation. He blew a cloud of blue smoke toward the ceiling. In a silence that grew more and more tense, Marcy waited. Finally he flicked the long ash from his cheroot into the ashtray and leaned forward.

"Marcy, you've sold me," he said. "Of course I'll have to put it up to Fred Royce and Lord Herbert Scott and the rest of our directors, but my recommendation will go a long way."

"Thank you, Charles," she said. "We'll do a good job for you, a mutually profitable connection." She picked up her briefcase.

As they went out together, Rolls said, "There's only one condition I must add, Marcy. You're presently handling the Saxon-Benz and the Ferroni Vinca. Both first-class cars, both expensive. I feel that you won't be able to do justice to three

de luxe lines. One other I'll accept, but if you take on our Rolls-Royce, one of the others must go."

"My father and I have already discussed the matter," she said. "And I assure you, Charles, that by the time we receive the first units from you—this autumn, I hope, either Prince Rupert of Saxe-Coburg, or Count Carlo Ferroni of Novara will no longer be shipping cars to Tarrant Motors."

"I'd guess Ferroni," Rolls said, frowning. "He makes a damned fine car, but he doesn't have the talent for business. Or perhaps, as Kitti says, he's tried too much with too little. He's always in trouble with the politicos and local labor, and the bankers."

"I've learned that his bankers have been putting the squeeze on him," Marcy said.

"Costain *Frères*, aren't they? They're known as a pretty tight-fisted bunch without an ounce of sentiment. But the Ferroni thing is hard to understand. He's made more than a few francs for them. It might be something personal we don't know about."

Afterwards, Marcy went for a short spin in the small Rolls-Royce in which Charles Rolls had come up from London. She was pleased at the smooth way it operated, the quiet engine, the gentle handling. He turned around at the outskirts of Luton and stopped the car.

"Sweet, isn't she?" he asked. "We build them finer than a Swiss watch. Every part tested and measured and retested. Marcy, I'm going to build the finest motor car in the whole world. It will be the absolute standard of quality."

"And the most expensive," Marcy said drily. "Could I drive it, Charles?"

"Of course," he said, and let her take the driver's seat.

Driving the car was a delight, and Marcy had no difficulty. As she turned into the gates at Ashdown, she glanced into the little mirror Rolls had affixed so the driver could see behind him. The dust cloud of a heavy car was close behind the Rolls. It too turned into the driveway and followed her to a stop in front of the manor house.

Evelyn, Kitti and Denis were seated at a table on the terrace, enjoying iced lemonade, as the two cars drove up. As she and Charles Rolls got out of the runabout, Marcy saw that the car was an American Cadillac, driven by a chauffeur. The man, in black coat, flared cavalry trousers, and leather puttees, got out and opened the door of the tonneau. The passenger stepped down and smiled at them.

Marcy drew a quick breath. Paul Costain looked elegant

in tweeds, his bowler hat brushed, his boots polished to that dull glow that marked the gentleman. How British! Marcy thought. A fitting pillar of the city.

Paul strode toward them across the flagstone terrace, his steps the measured cadence Marcy remembered. But she found there was no strong reaction, merely a gentle excitement. Like seeing an old acquaintance after years of separation, she thought, a normal curiosity about what he has been doing with his life. Though I'm afraid that question of *what Paul is* may never be answered. He has become too suave, too devious.

He was still Paul Costain, Marcy knew, as he came forward, with eyes for no one except the lovely exciting Kitti, Lady Wolverton. He smiled at Marcy's pretty friend, Evelyn Harkins, then, and his glance flicked to Marcy. He stopped still as if he had run into a pane of plate glass. His face went blank with surprise. Then he took two steps forward and seized both her hands in his.

"Marcy Tarrant! I can't believe it!" he exclaimed. "How wonderful. What on earth are you doing in England?"

"Business, Paul," she said airily. "For Tarrant Motors. You're looking exceedingly well. How do you enjoy London?"

"Very much," he said, releasing her hands with reluctance.

Turning to Denis Howerth, he shook hands. He said, "Thank you for inviting me, Lord Wolverton, and you, Lady Wolverton. Finding Marcy here is the most pleasant surprise. And I think she has brought luck with her. My news is good."

Marcy saw Denis visibly relax. "Thank God for that, we've been on tenterhooks. Costain, you know Miss Tarrant, then. This is her American friend, Miss Harkins. And Charles Stewart Rolls."

Paul shook hands, and muttered the standard British "Hujjedoo." To Rolls he said, "Know your firm well. Take my Cadillac in to your shop for service every now and then. Good men, that crew of yours."

Denis said, "The amenities can wait, Costain. Come into the house, we'll have a whiskey-soda, and while my man is getting you settled, we'll have a go at this good news of yours. God knows there has been little enough of pleasant tidings of late."

Before Paul turned to follow Denis, his eyes met Marcy's. She caught a gleam of anticipation in them, of eagerness. He was working up to some kind of proposal, she thought. She wondered just what form it would take, and decided to brace herself.

Charles Rolls said, "Very sharp fella, man-about-town type, he's seen everywhere. They say he's built Costain's London operation into a real concern. I've heard the man's a bit more than a plunger, too; takes some damnably perilous chances. But so far he's gotten away with them. Come a cropper some day, I suppose."

"There are chances and chances," Marcy said with a note of irony. "Some people think nothing of taking sharp curves at fifty miles an hour."

"Oh, that's different," Rolls said defensively. "When I do that I'm risking no one's neck but my own."

"Of course," Marcy said. She took his arm. "Come along, Charles, let's look at his Cadillac. It's made in Detroit, Michigan, said to be very good, though expensive. One of their designers was a man named Henry Ford, a self-taught genius who left school at fifteen. He's struggling along with his own firm, the Ford Motor Company. I've had some correspondence with that remarkable man. He has some startling ideas."

The Costain chauffeur was a stolid Cockney named Harris who proved happy to show off his pride and joy. The car, they found, was well-built, with some good innovations. It was built lower to the road than was usual with European cars.

At that moment the Napier runabout of the Waverleys drove up. They thanked Harris, and with Kitti and Evelyn waited to welcome the ruddy, mustached M.P. and his pretty wife.

"So good to see you again, Miss Tarrant. Three years, isn't it? And you, Charles," Waverley said in his bluff British voice. "Looking at cars, eh? You're making them now, eh, Charles?"

"I am. So you have a new Napier," Rolls said.

"Oh yes, minor stock interest, you know. A cut above the clunker we drove in the Luton-Peterborough road race, eh, Miss Tarrant? Big engine now, sixty horses. If we have time, we'll go for a ride."

"Only if I'm along, dear," Mrs. Waverley said, winking at Marcy. "I know you too well to let you abscond with this beautiful redhead."

"Humph! Harrumph! Charles, note the new type of shock absorber. And the carburetor—"

Denis Howerth and Paul Costain came out on the terrace, both smiling. Paul made an effort to take Marcy aside, but

Charles Rolls intervened and took Paul back to the study, on a request to discuss credit for retail financing.

The Waverleys went upstairs to get settled, and Denis joined his wife, Evelyn and Marcy at the terrace table. He poured himself a glass of lemonade.

"You smile. So it went well," Kitti said.

He drank deep, put down the glass, rubbed his hands together. "Beautifully. Costain has cleared the loan terms with Madame Demaret in Paris. She's the real wheel of Costain *Frères*, you know, so now it's clear sailing, with only the red tape left before we get our line of credit. Since we have a solvent, going concern, I only had to pledge my eyeteeth and my left arm and a few other concessions, for that's the Costain system. I'm afraid, though, that M'sieu Costain and Mme. Demaret will be disappointed with the speed Luton Machine shows in paying off. They can't vision the possibilities, as I can, of this new system. We've got the jump on our competitors by two years at least."

A successful day, Marcy thought as she dressed for dinner in a green moiré gown with a daringly low neckline. She should impress Paul, she thought impishly. She looked at her chatelaine watch and saw she had a few minutes to spare in which to add up the pluses of this visit to Ashdown: she could leave tomorrow afternoon for Paris with a sense of real accomplishment; the Luton deal, the Rolls-Royce agency were good; the only disturbing notes were Paul Costain, and the growing threat to Carlo Ferroni. Perhaps, she thought, when she got to Paris she could—

After dinner Paul finally managed to get Marcy alone. "Let's take a stroll in the gardens," he suggested. Knowing she had to face him sooner or later, Marcy adjusted a lace fascinator over her red hair and went outside with him. The last brightness of sunset was vanishing from the western sky and a delicious coolness touched the air. As they walked in the formal gardens, Marcy caught the scent of nicotiana and mignonette.

Along a garden path they came to a pretty little fountain she had noticed earlier. It reminded her of that secluded spot at Chateau Orient where she had dreamed and worried on a morning so long a time ago. But here, instead of a charming marble cupid, there was a cast-iron stag poised in the twilight with realistic wariness. Beside the pool was a marble bench. Marcy took a seat and motioned Paul to sit beside her.

"Marcy, you're lovely tonight," he said, putting an arm

lightly across her shoulders. She did not demur. He went on, "Dammit, girl, I've missed you. Missed you like crazy. Ever since that miserable scene in De Silva's restaurant, I've never forgotten what a damned boor I was. I've wanted to apologize, for I was out of line, and I know it. But I never could stir up the nerve to write you—false pride, I suppose. Now I do ask your forgiveness, Marcy."

"You're forgiven, Paul," she said gently. "At least for that."

"You hold other transgressions against me?"

"I do. Some that cannot be absolved by an act of penance, a plea for forgiveness. You've inflicted wounds, Paul, wounds that fester and may never heal."

"I should never have gone on that cruise to the South Seas, I know that now, Marcy. It was not only a useless, trouble-cursed trip, but I abandoned you, Marcy, just when we had something wonderful beginning. It cost me you, Marcy."

"Perhaps. But that's water under the bridge, Paul," she said. "That hurt has gone away long since. No, what I can't forgive is the cruelty of a telegram sent to a desperate, frightened girl when she cried to you for help."

He drew a deep ragged breath. "You're talking about Patsy. I confess that I'm not particularly proud of that episode. But my God, there was so much at stake—my career, the reputation of my family, my chance at this position—"

"And your freedom, of course. Did you know that when she got your wire she attempted suicide?"

"She didn't?" There was shock in his voice. "Oh, the little fool! Well, she managed to get over it. Mother writes that Patsy is happily married."

"And childless," Marcy said pointedly. "Paul, you were a grown man, and you took advantage of a naïve, romantic child."

"Romantic, yes, but naïve? Marcy, Patsy threw herself at me. I won't go into detail, but when a very pretty girl comes to a man's bedroom stark naked and throws her arms around his neck—" He made a gesture of helplessness. "Well, I'd have been less than a man if I hadn't given her what she wanted so badly."

"Plus something she didn't want," Marcy said. "Paul, that it should happen once I can understand. I was there myself, remember? But she told me you—you possessed her three times."

"Oh, hell, I suppose I did," he said lamely. "Patsy at

close range could be irresistible—and insistent. But there was nothing but animality between us—pure animality. Nothing like you and me. Marcy. That was different. Like something sacred. At least to me."

His arm tightened around her shoulders, but she said nothing. They were silent in the quiet garden, the only sounds the soft warble of a night bird and the tinkle of the fountain into its basin.

Finally Paul cleared his throat. He asked, "The child, Marcy, Patsy did have the child? And you took it, didn't you? To save her from scandal, and me. That's the little boy you have now, isn't it?"

"My Tommy is something special, and no concern of yours, or of Patsy," she said firmly. "Never encroach on that, Paul. Tommy is my son, who has all the love and affection any little boy will ever need. He has a doting grandfather who spoils him, and he has me."

"He has a father, a father who knows his son. On my last vacation in San Francisco, I drove past the house on Franklin Street. I saw the boy playing in the yard. He's a Costain, Marcy, there's simply no doubt of it."

"Damn you, Paul, keep your hands off Tommy!" Marcy cried. "Stay out of his life. I'll give you the same warning I gave another busybody: if you intrude in the life of that child, legally or any other way, I will not hesitate at murder to protect him. I mean that, Paul, I'm not exaggerating. *Keep your hands off.*"

He stared at her, his eyes gleaming in the failing light. "Whew! You're like a tigress with her cub, Marcy. All right, your Tommy is safe from me, and from my family. When I get around to it I'll provide the Norbert Costains with a whole handful of grandchildren, so one woods' colt won't make any difference."

"You're getting married?" she asked.

"Not yet. I have too many things I want to accomplish before I settle into the yoke of matrimony. There's plenty of time."

"It may be later than you think," Marcy said drily. She stood up. "Come, Paul, let's go back to the house."

He stood then and caught her hand. Turning her to face him, he grasped her in strong arms, and drew her close. In spite of herself, she felt her breath coming faster, for this male had an animal attraction that was almost overpowering. Her disappointments of him, the long festering hate, receded, leaving only desire.

"Marcy, listen," he said urgently. "We can't meet that way here at Ashdown. You have two days before you go on to Paris. You're saying goodbye to your friend, so come to me in London. I have a comfortable little flat in Chelsea. We'll turn those two days into a glorious adventure. I'll show you London by day and by night—"

His lips crushed hers as he pulled her taut against him. She felt her senses come alive. Her lips were responding, her breasts pressed deliciously against his broad chest. As his embrace quickened, she felt against her abdomen the cloth-straining hardness of his desire.

Then something broke in her. She pulled away from his seeking lips. She put her palms against his chest and thrust him away. Her arms, strong from many miles of driving, and hours of swimming and tennis, pushed him back hard enough that he staggered a little as he let her free.

"Paul, it won't do," she said, trying to keep her voice level. "Don't try to relight old fires. I'm not the silly girl you once enchanted. Once my world held you, all bright with hope, all tender with romance. Now I'm a woman, I have a son, I have a rewarding, absorbing business. Let it go, Paul. We've grown apart and it must stay that way."

She started away along the path but he caught up with her. He said, "You're wrong, Marcy. I will show you. Forget this stupid farce of being a big businesswoman in a man's world. Come to London."

"It's useless, Paul. As for business, my business in Paris won't wait. You'll have to be satisfied with the pretty little English girls who would grace your Chelsea flat."

"There have been a few," he said tersely. "This business in Paris, I suppose it includes an interlude in bed with my cousin Jacques Demaret. If it does you're going to be badly disappointed. Jacques—"

"Just what do you mean by that?" she snapped, her anger flaming. "What has Jacques told you?"

"Enough to be sure you warmed his bachelor bed as well as mine. " There was an ugly note in his voice. "You gave it to Jacques a couple of times, so I can guess there have been plenty of other men. So what makes you so coy about coming to London?"

Her hand came around in a swift arc. Her palm caught him on the cheek with an impact that staggered him. He raised a hand to cover his cheek, staring at her, startled.

"You men are animals!" she said, the contempt in her voice withering. "Is nothing sacred to you? Bragging about

your conquests, as if you were heroes. *Gentleman* is a term you coined for yourselves. No woman subscribes to it, for it's as false as your hearts. Paul, before tonight there was a tiny ray of hope for you. Your nastiness has destroyed it forever."

Angry, the rage boiling within her like molten steel, she turned away, and with quick impatient steps, she went up to the manor house. Behind her, she knew, Paul was standing belligerent, vengeful, and frustrated in the peaceful garden.

CHAPTER IV

The Channel crossing to Ostend was only moderately rough for that turbulent arm of the ocean. Marcy spent most of the short voyage on deck, watching the white cliffs of Dover recede into the mists behind her steamer. As the ship approached the coast of Belgium, she felt curiously alone. Her feeling was not only due to the farewell to her good friend Evelyn, but that furious scene with Paul in the garden at Ashdown seemed to have drained her emotionally. It had severed, she knew now, the last shred of the silver cord that had bound her to him since that night of the Nautilus Ball so long ago. Even now the thought of his smug, self-centered attitude made her anger rise.

She was angry at Jacques, too. She would, given the chance, express to Jacques her displeasure at his lack of discretion. Subtly, of course, and after she had concluded her Tarrant Motors business with him. And with luck, having put in her good word for Carlo.

Marcy took a train from Ostend to Brussels, and spent a day in the Belgian capital. She visited the Saxon-Benz dealer, and two small automobile factories, finding nothing of interest in either their design or methods. She listened to the sales pitches, nodded approval, and with that behind her, took the train for Paris.

She had a suite reserved in the small but elegant Strasbourg Hotel, just off the Rue de Rivoli. Awaiting Marcy was a huge bouquet of flowers from Jacques apologizing because he had been unable to meet her. The note went on:

> An overnight journey to Rouen for *Maman,* you understand. I am eager to see your lovely self again, Marcy, and will at our meeting tomorrow. Ten o'clock at our offices on the Rue Haussman. I will send a cab to your hotel. I have planned a most delightful *dîner à deux* for us tomorrow evening at my apartment in Faubourg Saint-Honoré. We have so many things to say to each other. I am seething with impatience.

I have a few things I want to say to you, Jacques, she thought ironically. She read on:

> So you won't be lonely by yourself in a strange city this evening, I am sending my cousin, André, to escort you to dinner at Maxim's, and a performance of the Folies Bergère. I understand you know the young man from the ship. So you are instructed to enjoy your evening, but on no account to fall in love with the boy André. That surrender you must reserve for
>
> Your Jacques

She was delighted that André would be her escort, since Jacques could not attend her. She liked André. He had only his salary, which Marcy guessed was not overly generous. An evening on the town on the firm's expense account would probably be a treat for André as well as for Marcy.

As for the "*dîner à deux,*" Marcy would of course attend. Remembering a similar occasion at *l'auberge* Livret, she did not delude herself about Jacques's plans for a climax to the evening. She would cope with that as it arose, she thought, believing herself by now a match for any wiles of the handsome Frenchman.

Her evening in Paris with André proved a delight. The young man was so ingenuous, so open, so pleased to be in the company of a beautiful woman. Shyly, he presented Marcy with a corsage of violets, which somehow she knew would never be put on André's expense account. He blushed as he helped her pin the violets on her gown of creamy white satin, a gown whose close fit complemented her fine figure.

At the famous Maxim's, they dined leisurely on *potage d'Artois, tournedos chasseur,* asparagus with hollandaise sauce, and crisp crusty rolls. The wine was an excellent Pommard, and the dessert a marvelous ice, rich with fruit. At the end came a plate of cheeses, and a very fine *Lacrima Cristi.*

"Jacques said in his note he had to go to Rouen today," Marcy said, as they sipped the wine.

"Yes, to his loss but my gain," André said, smiling at her. "An errand for Madame Demaret, I understand. An errand one of the very juniors, like myself, could well have handled. But *Maman*—that's what everyone calls her behind her back—insists that only Jacques carries out these little junkets. This in spite of the fact it isn't good for him. He has not yet recovered fully from his accident. Maybe he never will."

"That's a shame," Marcy said, surprised. "From the little I heard, it was a minor matter. Madame is a rather cold woman. Perhaps she is punishing Jacques for getting hurt. How did it happen, André?"

"I'm afraid it was quite his own fault. He had learned to drive the Renault. This particular evening he had taken a young lady to dinner at *l'auberge* Livret, an inn some miles from Chateau Orient. He was returning quite late in a heavy rainstorm, and did not slow down enough for it. At a turn, the car skidded and crashed into a tree. Jacques was in the hospital for more than a month, with a broken leg, a broken arm, and serious internal injuries. Even now he is not yet his old self, and must use a cane for walking."

"And the young lady?" Marcy asked, disturbed.

André's look had an odd texture. "She was killed. A pretty farm girl who had been working as a waitress in Compiègne. The Demarets paid her parents a substantial amount, and the matter was quickly hushed up. To keep the scandal down, his family spread the tale that he fell while hunting. Marcy, I shouldn't have told you that, but—well, I'm no great admirer of my cousin Jacques, jealous, I suppose. Yet I wouldn't want him to take advantage of you."

She put a consoling hand on his arm. "I appreciate your thoughtfulness, André. Don't worry, I know Jacques of old. I m sure I know how to handle him."

They went from Maxim's to the Folies Bergère. They had box seats, and Marcy found she rather enjoyed being stared at. She knew that she and André, who looked so handsome in his well-tailored evening clothes, made a striking couple.

The show was a thrill to Marcy, the singers fine, the comedians witty, the sets, the costumes and the girls beautiful. She gasped the first time the dancers came out in their very scanty costumes. She watched the leggy, high-breasted models pose in living tableaux in exotic settings.

Leaning over, she whispered to her escort, "André, aren't those girls wearing *anything*?"

Grinning, he shook his head. "It is the boast of the management that these girls are completely nude," he said. "They claim that is the only way the true perfection of the female form can be displayed."

"Well, I must say they are certainly displaying it," Marcy said. "But they are such angelically lovely beings."

It was nearly midnight when André brought her to her hotel in a hansom cab. Telling the driver to wait, he escorted

her to the door of the Strasbourg. Taking her hand, he said, "An evening I will never forget, Marcy."

"Wasn't it fun?" she asked warmly. "André, you are the perfect host. The dinner was superb; the show most entertaining. I'll remember this evening too."

Reaching up, she drew his head down, and her lips met his in a long kiss, warmly friendly, but with a little edge of passion. When she released him he sighed deeply, smiled rather shakily. The complete gentleman, he said sincerely, "Thank you, Marcy. I think—I think I've fallen in love with you." Amazed by his own courage, he released her hand and fled toward the waiting cab.

When Marcy was ushered into the office of Jacques Demaret the next morning, she was shocked at the appearance of the man who limped toward her. She had expected some change, but not this. He was handsome still, but he had aged greatly. His face had a haggard look; the dark hair showed a frost of gray at the temples. He had a slight stoop, no longer ramrod straight.

"Marcy, my dear girl!" he said, taking her hand. "You are even more beautiful than I remember you. Sit down, sit down. André took good care of you last evening?"

"He was the perfect substitute, Jacques," Marcy said. "Though not quite equal of the original." She found herself hoping that André would never achieve the suave but empty sophistication of his cousin.

As she seated herself and smoothed the skirt of her smart suit, Jacques limped to the swivel chair behind the big rosewood desk and seated himself slowly. They chatted about family matters and other inconsequential things for a minute or two, then Marcy opened her briefcase and drew out a sheaf of papers. She plunged into the business matters for which she had come to Paris.

As she had expected, Jacques was shrewd and quick where business was concerned. After an hour had passed, Marcy put her notes back into her case, assured that Costain *Frères* was ready to supply whatever export financing Tarrant Motors might need to clear for shipment the units of the several manufacturers.

"For the Saxon-Benz exports of Prince Rupert, we can deal through our Erfurt branch," Jacques said. "As for Count Carlo's shipments from Novara, we have an office in Milan. If you buy from your unknown supplier in England, as you say you may, our London office is very strong, and quite ready. Marcy, I promise I'll prepare, this very after-

noon, a memorandum outlining the commitments we have agreed upon. I'll see that a copy is mailed to you."

"It will, of course, meet the approval of Madame Demaret?" Marcy asked bluntly.

He hesitated. "I don't anticipate any—er, difficulties. *Maman* usually follows my recommendations."

"That's fine," Marcy said. "I'd hate to find after I leave here that our financing is held up."

"I was hoping she would be present at our talk," he said. "But other affairs—and it may be well. *Maman* does not approve of women in business, in spite of the fact that she is such a successful example. Moreover, she hates automobiles."

"An odd quirk, but I presume she has her reasons," Marcy said. "Along those lines, Jacques, I have heard, by the grapevine, of course, that Carlo Ferroni is in the market for a large loan, to get his production up to a profitable level. Since you made the original loan, I wonder if Costain *Frères* will lend him the working capital he needs. And extend the earlier note, of course."

He looked disconcerted, and a little angry. "What is your interest in that Italian?"

"Why, Tarrant Motors sells his cars, and they are damned good automobiles," Marcy said. "We'd hate to lose them. That should be reason enough."

He shifted position in the chair, as if uncomfortable. His stern look relaxed. "Of course. I understand your position. To ease your mind, I'll recommend the loan matter, and the note extension, in my memorandum this afternoon. You're sure there's nothing personal behind this?"

"Why, Jacques, of course there isn't," she lied. "I haven't seen the man for four years, and his letters to my firm are strictly business."

He leaned back in the big chair, more relaxed now. "I didn't mean to pry, Marcy. It's all right. I was concerned about our financial position with Ferroni. In fact we have put one of our men at his factory, as a comptroller and adviser. We have had some—shall we say difficulties?—in dealing with Count Carlo, so I must word my memorandum to *Maman*—the officers, rather, very carefully to manage her assent. But as a favor to you dear Marcy, I will accomplish it."

"You don't know how much that means to Tarrant Motors, and to me, Jacques. Thank you," she said. She gathered purse, gloves and briefcase.

He walked with her to the door, leaning quite heavily on his cane. "I'll send my limousine for you about seven, lovely lady. We'll have a great time talking about France, and America, and war and society and love, as well as having the finest of dinners."

"I'll be counting the hours, Jacques," Marcy said, giving him a pat on the cheek and her most winning smile.

Since her evening with Jacques was to be a private *"dîner à deux"* Marcy dressed carefully but rather informally for it. Instead of one of her grand gowns, she put on a trim, quite handsome, tailored suit, skirt straight, with a frilly blouse under a close-fitting jacket. She clasped the chain of the sapphire pendant, which Barry had given her so long ago, around her neck. Since the July day had been quite warm, she could forgo an outer cloak.

The Demaret chauffeur who brought the Citroën limousine to the Hotel Strasbourg that evening was a surly, taciturn man, who seemed to feel put upon to be working so late. As he tooled the big car through the narrow streets toward Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Marcy in the back seat was alert to the operation of the Citroën. It had trouble negotiating some of the sharp corners, and Marcy thought, not for the first time, how lucky residents of San Francisco were that most of their streets were comfortably wide.

Jacques Demaret was waiting for her. As she entered his spacious apartment on the third floor of a fairly new building, he greeted her with a hug and an ardent kiss. She caught herself wondering if this was the *boîte* to which he had invited her to stay after her earlier visit to Chateau Orient, following that passionate interlude at *l'auberge* Livret. Perhaps. The flat had the oddly intimate atmosphere of a hideaway. As Jacques went to the kitchen to give final instructions to the caterer, Marcy wandered about the rooms, admiring the high shelves of books in hand-tooled leather bindings, the comfortable overstuffed furniture. Some of the paintings on the wall were of the Fauvism movement, the merit of which kept Paris art critics arguing incessantly.

As Jacques came back and took her by the arm to seat her in a comfortable chair, she caught a faint whiff of perfume, perhaps the scent of Jacques's pomade. He looked less haggard tonight, no doubt having spent a good deal of care on his appearance. He was freshly shaven, and she suspected that he had even used a tiny touch of rouge to mend the grayness of his complexion.

He was dressed informally, in a beautiful brocade smoking

jacket over a ruffled shirt with open collar. His striped flannel trousers had a knife-sharp crease, and he wore slippers of soft Morocco leather.

Sitting down with slow care opposite her, he said, "My dear Marcy, I hope you will pardon my informal attire. Since my accident as soon as I come home from business, I enjoy getting out of the somber uniform custom insists that we wear. Then I relax with a glass of my favorite sherry. Will you join me? Jules, the Amontillado for me and Mlle. Tarrant. *Vite, vite*!"

The valet, Jules, moved with the silent, efficient grace of the well-trained gentleman's gentleman. He placed on a tabouret beside Marcy a crystal goblet of the tawny sherry. She sipped it as Jacques kept up a steady flow of conversation. Much of it was inconsequential, but she took notice when he said, "It has been a long day. The conference with you was only one of several. A wearying session with *Maman* about the Rouen trip—that woman my mother is insatiable for detail. Then later I sweated over the memorandum concerning Tarrant Motors, with a footnote about Count Carlo Ferroni. I finished it, thank the good God, just before the clerks began streaming out at day's end."

At that moment Jules reentered the room and stood quietly, his face impassive. Jacques, turning, asked, "Yes, Jules?"

"The caterer is ready to serve, m'sieu," the valet said. "Do you wish to dine immediately, or shall I tell him to wait on your pleasure?"

Jacques looked at Marcy, smiling, his eyebrows arched. "Now, Jules, now, tell him. The menu is very special, Marcy, and the food must not be spoiled by delay. I hope you are hungry." He rubbed his palms together in a gesture of expectancy.

"My father says I have the appetite of a stevedore," she said. "I bow to your taste, Jacques, remembering how true it was at—at another time."

"Ah, you will see, tonight will eclipse even that fine dinner at *l'auberge* Livret," he said.

He seated her beside his place at a table exquisitely set, handsome gold-rimmed porcelain, glittering crystal, tableware of sterling silver with the Costain crest. Jules the valet took up his station behind Jacques's chair, and a pretty girl in maid's uniform behind Marcy's. Dishes clattered in the kitchen as the caterer, a stout mustached man in a towering chef's cap, prepared each course for serving.

Marcy was fond of good French cooking, and Jacques was evidently a gourmet. He named and described each course as it appeared just as the previous dishes were whisked away. The soup was *potage Fontanges*, followed by *sorbets du vin de Champagne*. The main course was *canetons à la Rouennaise*, tender Rouen duckling, with eggplant Spanish style, and *fondue aux truffles*. The delightful repast was crowned by a *bombe Maltaise*, ineffably smooth and rich.

The wines Jacques had chosen were marvelous. He was proud to announce the vintages, a Chateau d'Yquem 1847, a Chambertin 1846, and a Chateau Lafitte 1848. Marcy was appalled at what her host must have paid for each of these precious bottles, yet she was well enough versed in wines to appreciate that they were not only rare, but a remarkable taste experience.

Afterwards, replete, she went with Jacques into the book-lined study, where Jules brought them snifters of Armagnac. The talk was gentle and slow, of small import, as Marcy and Jacques sipped their brandy. From kitchen and hall came the muted clink of silver and the rattle of dishes as the servants cleared the table and the caterer and his maid prepared to leave.

"The meal was superb, Jacques," Marcy told him. "I doubt if ever in my life I will find one to match it. And the wines—" She shook her head in silent admiration.

Jacques beamed at her compliments. "If you were pleased, my dear, my days of careful planning were not wasted."

"I am pleased," Marcy said. "It was unique."

The noise in the kitchen died down, and the caterer and the girl, laden with hampers and utensils, went past the open door of the study, followed by Jules, carrying more equipment. A short time later the valet returned. From the open door, he said, "All is in good order, m'sieu. The caterer has gone. Is there anything further you need of me?"

"No, Jules, you may go," Jacques said. "Ah, you won't be in tomorrow?"

"It is my day off, but if m'sieu has need of me—"

"No, no. Have a pleasant holiday. Lock my door as you leave now."

Marcy heard the soft closing of the door, and the rattle of the lock as Jules turned it. *The stage is set*, she thought. *I haven't learned the script beyond this scene.* She'd have to wait and see, for the next move was up to Jacques, who must take center stage.

The first move was stereotyped. Jacques refilled the brandy

snifters from the decanter. He placed them on the stand. Slowly, carefully, he lowered himself into a seat beside her on the settee, more stiffly than earlier in the evening.

"Is your leg paining you, Jacques?" she asked in sympathy.

"A bit. Sometimes it is hardly there, the pain Sometimes it is like an aching tooth. If I strain it, it turns into a raging dragon. But I tell myself it grows better every day, though my doctors say—" He stopped, frowning as if at some unpleasant thought.

Marcy was silent. Beyond her, a soft summer breeze wafted through the open windows, bringing with it the smells of the city. The warm air was pungent with them, the odor of drains, the soft-coal smoke of St. Denis factories, several miles away, the ammoniacal miasma of horse droppings. There were sounds, too, the clip-clop of horses' hoofs at varying speeds, the cry of a street hawker trying to peddle the last of his pitiful wares for a few centimes Now someone shouted a name, and briefly there was loud talk and laughter, bibulous and inane.

A stronger movement of air lifted away the city odors. The night grew quiet as the hour grew later and traffic diminished. The persistent cry of a baby from some nearby apartment gradually sobbed into silence.

In spite of the nearness of Jacques, Marcy was lulled into a state of somnolence by good food and good wine. She shook herself, and opened a conversation with Jacques, who had been as silent as she for some minutes. She groped for a subject. "How do you like the Citroën?" she asked

He showed mild interest. "Rather better than the Renault. It rides more comfortably and is easier to start. A bit heavy for our northern hills around the chateau. I'd like a runabout, in addition, but I must catch *Maman* in a good mood. She hates all automobiles."

"I wouldn't think she would invest money in the factories that make them."

"That's something else again," Jacques said somewhat grimly. "Though to her cars are inventions of the devil, she is not above making a profit out of his Satanic Majesty. I suppose she is logical enough except that she blames the car for the accident that nearly killed me, instead of accepting the truth, that it was my own stupidity "

"It *was* your fault, then? Why, Jacques?"

"Too much wine, too much anger at the little *poule* I took to dinner at *l'auberge* Livret. With the champagne I realized I was desecrating my memory of our lovely evening

in this same inn, yet I drank more wine and went ahead. Driving home later, in the dark and the rain, I drove faster and faster, angry at myself now. Then it all happened so fast—" He shook his head, remembering the horror of it.

"It is sad when a life is lost," Marcy murmured.

His jaw set angrily. "Where did you get that? Oh, from André, of course. Our young cousin had damned well better learn to keep his mouth shut. It cost enough." Again he stopped without finishing his thought. He stood up and took two steps without his cane, and nearly fell. Marcy jumped up and grasped his arm to steady him. He shook her hand away. "I'm not an invalid!" he said harshly. He picked up his cane and limped to the doorway. Turning, he said, "Excuse me. I have some medication I must take now."

He was gone for so long Marcy began to worry that something had happened to him. At last she heard him call, "Marcy, please come here."

She found him in the bedroom. He had thrown aside the smoking jacket and the shirt. Clad in a light cotton singlet, he was struggling with his trousers. "Help me get these double-damned pants off," he said between clenched teeth.

She knelt, and slid the trousers down and off, careful with his injured leg. "You wish to go to bed?" she asked.

"I do. And Marcy, if you ever loved me, if you still love me, come lie with me."

She felt a wave of pity for him. There was something so desperate about his plea, it touched her deeply. This was not the bold rake of the *Lucania*, and *l'auberge* Livret. Then he was lusty, demanding, confident, a veritable stallion. She had enjoyed his virility, and the expertise which had brought her to a peak of satisfaction. Did her body mean so much to him?

He pulled the singlet over his head, and on the thin torso she saw the healed red slash of a wound across the chest. Pity for him grew, knowing his sense of loss must be terrible. *He's trying to assert his manliness*, she thought. Should she serve his longing? Strange, she felt no desire for him, but she could help him. She could pretend, while she warmed him with her body.

"Please, Marcy, please," he said brokenly. "Take your clothes off, and lie beside me. To feel the fresh, glowing warmth of your flesh, to do with you as a man should—"

Without answering, she bent down and kissed his cheek. She went into the bathroom and took off her clothing, hanging the garments on the rim of the bathtub. She found a

dressing gown hanging on a hook. She slipped it on over her nakedness and went again to the bedroom.

His clothing was in a heap beside the bed, and he was in bed, the covers pulled up to his chin. He stared at her, his eyes more sad than amorous. Remembering those other times, she felt excitement begin to glow in her. Perhaps this wouldn't be as bad as she'd feared, she thought, and let his dressing gown drop away from her nude figure.

He made a little moaning sound and shut his eyes. She slipped under the comforter beside him. His body felt cold against the healthy warmth of her flesh. Putting her arms around him, she pulled him close against her, pressing his chest against the eager fullness of her breasts. Their lips met. She felt his tongue tip searching her mouth.

She was only slightly aroused, but she pretended passion, as his hand slipped along the trim roundness of her belly, and rested between her thighs. She parted her legs so the searching hand could have full play, and in turn she put her own hand along the hollowness of his abdomen, feeling a ridge of scar tissue like a wale. How terribly thin he was, she thought. Now her fingers touched the pubic hair, and with a sense of shock, she touched his penis, finding it flaccid, as meager and lifeless as the organ of a preadolescent child. She worked with it, she thrust against it, but it responded no more than she responded to Jacques's desperately searching hand.

After a lifetime—fifteen minutes? a half-hour?—Marcy gave up. She drew back the coverlet and arose. Looking down, she saw Jacques turn his face to the wall. A bent arm covered his eyes. His shoulders were shaking. *Why, he's crying!* Marcy thought, pity tearing at her. To see a man cry—it gave her a familiar sense of tragedy. It came to her, another man, another bed, a different failure. Strange, she thought, that Barry was humiliated by an excess of male urgency, and Jacques, powerless as a man, as humiliated as Barry in his own way.

Picking up the dressing gown, she went into the bathroom. Quickly she repaired her toilette and slipped into her clothing. Dressed, she returned to the bedroom.

"Jacques," she said, "I must leave now. Don't call your chauffeur. I'll find a hansom cab."

Though he must have known she might have to walk blocks at this hour before she found a cab, he did not demur. Slowly he sat up, the covers falling away from his chest.

"Marcy, Marcy, please don't think badly of me," he

pleaded. "My God, I was trying, trying, but nothing worked. What will become of me, Marcy? When a beautiful, warm, shapely woman like you lies naked beside me, eager for attention, and I can do nothing to satisfy her, what does the future hold for me? Is God punishing me for killing that girl in that wreck?"

"Don't say that," Marcy soothed. "That was an accident, and no more. As for the—the other thing, don't worry about it, Jacques. In time your powers will come back, I'm sure."

"I wish I thought so," he said dully. "I refused to accept what my doctors told me. I *knew* I would be a whole man again. I made tonight the test. I brought together every favorable element, the finest of dinners, the rarest of wines, and the most beautiful and passionate woman I ever knew. A girl I have loved for so long—Marcy that's true, though I hardly knew it myself—and what happened? Nothing. I tried, you tried, and at the end I was still a nothing, a cipher. I'm finished, Marcy, finished, a shell. This is the end of Jacques Demaret."

"Jacques, stop talking like that," Marcy said sharply. "You'll see it all in a different light in the morning. It's a temporary condition, Jacques, believe that as I do. I do not think any the less of you because of tonight, remember that. And I do still love you. So good night."

Stooping, she kissed him warmly on the lips. As she straightened, she saw tears again well from those dark eyes, and she felt the stinging warmth of her own tears. For this was a broken man, and the tragic sight haunted her still as she went down the stairs and out into the dark emptiness of the Paris streets at night.

CHAPTER V

After the Lucullan feast of the night before, Marcy had no appetite for breakfast. She ordered a pot of coffee and a plate of croissants brought to her room, and sipped and nibbled as she worked on the completion of her notes on the Paris mission. Her train for Germany left in the late afternoon.

She hadn't slept well, still shaken by her shattering experience with Jacques. When she left his apartment, she had walked through the dimness of silent streets, past the blind faces of the buildings. Far ahead she had seen the lights of the downtown area softening the vault of the night sky. She was not afraid. Her heel taps had echoed staccato on cement and cobbles as she strode along, sure of her ability to take care of herself. Once the meow of a stalking tomcat startled her, and a little later glass crashed somewhere in the far distance.

She heard the slow clop of a horse's hooves and hurried to the next street corner. By the greatest of good fortune she found a hansom cab returning from delivering a late fare. The weary cabman refused at first to take her, but a fifty-franc note waved under his nose changed reluctance to avarice. A half-hour later the cabbie delivered her safe and sound at the entrance of the Strasbourg Hotel.

So this morning Marcy worked editing and clarifying her notes, and as she did so she tried to keep her thoughts away from the disheartening scene of last night. She could cope better, she thought, with the anger she felt for Paul, than the pity which racked her for Jacques.

She finished her notes shortly before noon and was strapping the last of her suitcases shut, when there was a knock on her door. She opened the door and to her surprise found André Costain, with a man in the blue uniform and flat cap of the Paris police.

Marcy was shocked at the drawn look on her young friend's face. "André!" she cried. "What is it? What has happened?"

The two men came past her into the room, and she closed

the door behind them. Facing her, André drew a deep breath. "It's Jacques," he said. "He's dead, Marcy. Shot himself early this morning. This is Inspector Palliser of the *Sûreté*. He wants to ask you a few questions."

Stunned, Marcy dropped into a chair. "Poor, poor Jacques. How terrible. What do you wish to know, Inspector?"

As André took a seat beside her and took her hand in his, the inspector sat gingerly on the edge of a chair facing Marcy. He took out notebook and pencil. "Mlle. Tarrant, what was your relationship with the deceased?" he asked.

"We were business associates, and long-time friends as well," she said, still unable to accept the fact that Jacques was dead. "I had a business conference with him yesterday morning in his office, and he invited me to have dinner with him in the evening at his apartment. We dined very well, then sat and talked until quite late, for we hadn't seen each other for almost four years. When I saw him growing tired, and he complained of his leg hurting him, I helped him get ready for bed, since his valet had retired. After he was comfortable, I said good night and left the apartment."

"What was his mood, Mlle. Tarrant?"

"He seemed quite well at dinner, and laughed and chatted pleasantly. Then later, when his leg began to pain, he complained about the slowness of his recovery from the accident. He mentioned some problems at the office as well. He seemed to think he was being pushed aside on important decisions. I tried to cheer him up, and thought I had. But, Inspector, at no time did Jacques suggest suicide."

The inspector, still writing busily, said, "It must have been in his mind, for he left notes before he put the muzzle of his revolver in his mouth and pulled the trigger."

"What he wrote checked exactly with what you just told us, Marcy," André said gently. "Continuing poor health, and the feeling he wasn't secure in his position with Costain *Frères*."

"Oh, the poor, poor man. I've lost a friend," Marcy said.

"You do testify that M'sieu Demaret was alive and in his right mind when you left him?" the inspector persisted. "And not—ah, under the influence?"

"Except for being depressed. He had brandies after dinner, Armagnac, two, I think. But he was not drunk. His farewell to me was most friendly, very affectionate."

With an air of finality, the inspector closed his notebook and replaced it and his pencil in his tunic pocket. He said,

"I think that is all, then, mademoiselle. When my superiors have my report, I am sure they will close the case."

"Mlle. Tarrant has an important engagement in Germany," André said. "Will she be permitted to take this afternoon's train, as she planned?"

"If she has no other reason to remain in Paris," the inspector said. "I have it all here." He tapped his breast pocket. "It all checks exactly. His note to the police absolved anyone else. There was another note for Mme. Demaret, which of course has been delivered unopened, which we will peruse later. I am sure that will clarify the situation further. No, Mlle. Tarrant, we have no reason to hold you in Paris."

"Thank you, Inspector, for your understanding and courtesy," Marcy said. "Will you stay, André, for a few minutes?"

The young man nodded, and Marcy ushered the inspector to the door, dabbing at her eyes with a scrap of lace handkerchief. "Thank you again, Inspector, for your kindness."

The inspector bowed low, and turned away down the hall. Marcy closed the door and stood with her back against it. The tears came now. Sobbing, she went into the arms of André, who held her tight, patting her lightly on the back as she cried.

Regaining her composure, she drew away and wiped her eyes.

"Poor Jacques. It was so needless," she said. "André, I must change my plans. I must stay for the funeral."

He shook his head. "No, Marcy. Come, sit down, I must talk to you." He led her to the divan and sat beside her.

"Marcy, I think you should take your Gotha train this afternoon as planned," he said, frowning. "I know you were fond of Jacques, but *Maman*—well, Mme. Demaret is a stubborn, determined, vindictive woman. She knew you were dining *à deux* with Jacques last night; there isn't much that goes on around Costain *Frères* that she doesn't know. So, not liking you even before, Madame will find reason in her own mind to blame you for her son's death. On top of that—and this may sound trivial, but it isn't—she detests the motor car business, hates it like hellfire, and you are a part of it."

Marcy sat in deep silence for a long minute. At last she nodded. "All right, André. I'm ashamed to be running from one bitter old woman, but I'll take that train."

"One further reason, Marcy. The papers will get hold of it, but the power of the Costains will probably keep it to a

paragraph in the back pages. Unless—well, if you are out of reach of inquisitive reporters, it will stop there."

"I feel like a traitor to Jacques, but—Who found him, André?"

"I did," he said grimly. "When Jacques didn't come to work this morning, Madame sent me to his apartment to see if he was ill. The door was locked, no sound from inside. I found Jacques's valet, Jules, in his apartment on the sixth floor. Though it was his day off, luckily he hadn't left. We used his key and entered. Jacques was lying in a pool of blood on the study floor, dead."

"Was he dressed?" Marcy asked, with a shudder.

"Partly. In nightshirt, robe and slippers. He had evidently been up for some time before he—he did it. He had written three notes, the one to his mother several pages long. Then he took his pistol and shot himself. No one seems to have heard the shot."

"What a shock to you to find him, André," she said.

"It was awful, Marcy, it made me sick. But it didn't hit me as hard as it did Jules. I heard him moan, and a heavy thump. When I turned, there was the poor devil on the floor, fainted dead away. I looked around then and on the study desk I saw three envelopes propped against a book. One was addressed to the *Sûreté*, one to 'Mme. Marie Demaret, *ma maman*,' and the third to 'Mlle. Marceline Tarrant.' "

"Oh, André, will you get it from the police and send it to me?"

"No need for that," he said. He looked around like a conspirator, and handed her an envelope. "Here it is. When I saw Jules was still out cold, I filched it and slipped it into my pocket. You and I are the only ones who know about it."

With shaking hands she opened it:

My dearest Marcy:

I thank you with all my heart for the aid and encouragement you gave me last night, but it solved nothing. I cannot go on living the life of half a man. Perhaps I am taking the coward's way out, but everything is crowding down upon me until I can bear life no longer.

Please remember me with kindness, and pray for my soul, for in my own way I have long loved you.

You understand that last night was only a comedy.

With my love eternally,

Jacques

When Marcy had finished reading, trying desperately to hold back her tears, she handed the note to André. When he had ready it, he gave it back to her.

"I suppose I should give this to the police," she said.

"No, Marcy," he said gently. "That would serve no purpose. I'm sure there is nothing in this that wasn't in the other two notes. I'm sure Inspector Palliser has already closed his case, nor does he need this. Besides," he added with a wan smile, "I'd be in serious trouble because I took it. Let it be our secret."

"All right, then," Marcy said doubtfully, putting the note into her purse. "It has been so wonderful of you, André, to help me through this. I'm forever grateful. Will you manage to see me off on the train?"

He bowed low over her hand. "I hope to, dear girl. If I don't it will be because of war or catastrophe—or *Maman*."

Marcy completed her packing in a daze. Was there anything more she could have done for Jacques? she wondered. She shook her head. She'd offered him encouragement, and kind words, and companionship. And at the last she'd offered the greatest gift within her governance, her own body. That too failed, as it had with Barry Olden so long ago. Marcy was consoled that she did not abandon either one of them, as she had not abandoned her little Tommy. Perhaps that made up for her other failures. And even if her heart broke, she would not let Tommy fall into such a slough of utter despond that trapped these others. *Jacques,* Marcy prayed, *may God be merciful to your soul.*

She was standing at the steps of her railway car, looking at her watch, when André came hurrying up all out of breath. He thrust a small florist's box into her gloved hand. "Wear this for luck, Marcy," he said. "Tried to get here sooner, but I couldn't shake the flics and Mme. Demaret. A thousand details, a thousand questions. A good thing you're leaving, Marcy. *Maman* is as bitter as acid, though she has not said anything to me directly about you. But she will, I'm afraid, along with her curses for the automobile. That's a mania of hers by now."

"Because of the accident to Jacques, of course," Marcy said. Then a thought struck her. "André, Jacques told me he had prepared a memorandum about his conference with me, and a loan extension and a new loan for Carlo Ferroni. I wonder if it has been passed along to Madame."

"I don't know anything about it, but I'll find out," he promised.

She said urgently, "If you do locate it, try to hold it back from Mme. Demaret as long as you possibly can. In her present mood the memo might be disastrous for Ferroni Motors. Later, when she has calmed down, she may approve it."

"Marcy, I'll do my best," he said. "I'm pretty junior in the Costain hierarchy, but I might manage it. I'll try."

"Bless you, André. I love you like the brother I never had. If you ever come to America—"

The hoot of the engine's whistle echoed from the blackened beams of the station roof. Pulling André close, Marcy gave him a warm, heartfelt kiss. Then without looking back, she hurried up the steps to her compartment.

The train ride was uneventful, and in Gotha she stayed at the same pleasant hotel where she had been four years before with her father and her Aunt Dora. Still numbed by the death of Jacques, her spirits brightened a little when a few minutes after she was settled, a bellman brought her a cablegram:

EVERYTHING HERE FINE TOMMY GROWING LIKE A WEED AND GETTING TOO SMART FOR HIS BRITCHES STOP SALES GOOD IN ALL LINES INCLUDING USED CARS STOP DOM SENDS BEST SAYS ORDERS PILING UP FOR FERRONI VINCA SO TELL YOUR ITALIAN FRIEND TO STEP ON THE GAS AND SPEED UP DELIVERIES STOP

NOTHING NEW ON LAUGHLIN FRONT STOP AM NOW CONVINCED CLARIBEL WAS ACTING SOLO STOP SAW PATSY TWO DAYS PAST AND SHE FRIENDLY STOP NO REFERENCE TO TOMMY STOP DID YOU HAVE GOOD TIME IN PARIS OR DID COSTAINS WANT FILLINGS FROM YOUR TEETH QUESTION MARK ALL HERE SEND LOVE MUCH AND MUCH FROM THOMAS MARY LULU LOGAN AND ESPECIALLY TOMMY WHO MISSES YOU TERRIBLY SO HURRY HOME

Immeasurable relief flooded over Marcy, with the threat to Tommy averted. She had great respect for her father's judgment, for though he sometimes called himself "a dumb Irishman" he was one of the most astute men she had ever known. She had been dreading the prospect of a legal battle, for in spite of the ability of Sandy Woodworth, the law could do strange things. As Claribel had said, the courts did lean always toward the rights of the natural mother. Working on that, by a determined effort and the spending of

much money, the Laughlins might manage to tear Tommy away and give him to Patsy, in spite of the release and Marcy's other stratagems. She shivered a little, saying a silent prayer that the matter would never go to court.

Prince Rupert and Princess Lilli were as pleasant and gracious to Marcy as before. The princess was beautiful as ever, the Prince a little heavier, a little grayer, yet still exuding charm. Marcy had their invitation to stay with them at the *schloss*, but she pleaded press of work and inconvenience, remaining at the hotel where she could work better.

On her visit to the Saxon-Benz plant, she found it greatly expanded. Many new machines had been installed, and the staff had devised some new construction techinques. Prince Rupert and Herr Landstaff showed her through, proud of their fine factory.

"The men are my greatest problem," Prince Rupert said. "German workmen are good, thorough men, but the standard of perfection I demand for my Saxon-Benz is so high it can be met only by the very best of machinists and mechanics. I refuse to compromise, so we build cars slowly."

In the prince's office, later that afternoon, Marcy gave him and Herr Landstaff a tentative schedule for deliveries Tarrant wanted them to follow. She told them of the financial arrangements she had made through the Erfurt branch of Costain *Frères*. The prince was quite pleased with those matters, but not happy about the next item of Marcy's agenda.

"Prince Rupert, Tarrant Motors has set up a policy, approved by my father, our treasurer Dom Renfrow, and myself, that we will limit the number of makes we will handle on the West Coast. We sell the American Oldsmobile in the middle range, and are looking for a very inexpensive make which can be sold to working people. At the top we cannot handle more than two makes of luxury cars. And it appears that one of them will be a new, very fine British car which has many features we want. I will not name it now."

The prince frowned. "I am not without connections in the industry, Frl. Tarrant," he said. "So I know the one you mean. I agree that it will be severe competition for my Saxon-Benz, yet I hope that will be your other choice."

"At the moment we handle your car and the Ferroni Vinca, and frankly the Italian car outsells your product in our market," Marcy said. "Our relations with your firm have been very fine, your deliveries of cars and parts have been

good. Since that is not quite true with Ferroni, we have not yet decided which one we must reluctantly drop. Perhaps if you could make some changes, provide a larger range of discounts."

"What changes are needed in our fine car?" Herr Landstaff asked, bristling.

In reply, she unrolled a blueprint on the prince's desk. "This drawing was prepared by Cal Plumb, Tarrant's maintenance superintendent. He is a first-rate practical engineer. Cal says one can design the finest car in the world, but not until it has stood the test of actual use in the field, with every Tom, Dick, and Harry driving it, can its faults be found."

"Ach, that is true enough," Herr Landstaff agreed. "Sir, remember the countershaft bearing?"

The prince silenced him with a wave of the hand. "That is ancient history, Max. Give us the bad news, Fräulein."

She went over the drawing point by point. The two men were mollified now, assured she knew her business.

"Yah, a roller bearing there instead of plain babbitt," Max Landstaff agreed. "And a longer cam in the steering for quicker response. Emergency brake at the left side, no big problem. Move the gas tank under the body and shield it. That will cost some money, eh, sir?" He looked at the prince.

"The other changes are minor, and I see their value," the prince said. He rubbed his mustache nervously. "But the gas tank, that is not reasonable. We will have to think about that."

"You do that, for we want it for American use. Don't misunderstand me," Marcy continued "We think your car is well designed and the workmanship is superb. It is just that, well, it is a little, shall we say, stolid? It lacks the snap and the style of the Ferroni, its riding qualities are somewhat too stiff, and the Ferroni has more powerful brakes."

"We make some changes, eh, Max? We will not let that Italian beat us out. Even if he does sometimes show a touch of genius. Only that gasoline tank, I don't know. It throws some complications in chassis and body."

"I'm sure you two will come up with a solution," Marcy said. "Now if you will ship us cars with automatic cranking, we'll pay you a fat bonus on every unit."

Max Landstaff shook his head. "I work on it, Ferroni works on it, I suspect Charles Rolls and Otto Daimler and Emile Levassor and a dozen others work on it, plus many

men in your own country. And some day it will be solved, but it is still years away, that self-starter."

Marcy gathered up her papers. She smiled at the two men. "I hope it's soon. All over the world women are waiting with their hands full of money, wanting to buy a motor car that does not have to be cranked."

Max Landstaff remained at the desk, studying the blueprint. Prince Rupert walked with Marcy to the door. "You go now to visit my Italian rival, Ferroni?" he asked.

"Yes, though I may stop a day or two in Munich. I have word that two young men have designed a good inexpensive car. We are not committed for that part of our line, so we are searching. It is my father's contention and mine, Prince Rupert, that there is an immense market waiting for the man who puts out an inexpensive, reliable car that working men can afford."

"I know those fellows in Munich, the Falk brothers," the prince said. "I don't think you will find there what you are looking for. But who knows?"

"One can never tell about these back-alley inventors; sometimes they come up with remarkable solutions," Marcy said. "I can't stay long in any case. I must be in Novara by the sixteenth."

"Why, I'll see you there. I've shipped my racing car there already, to Milan, that is, and my driver, Anton Mueller. I follow by train tomorrow."

"What is the occasion?" she asked.

"It's the Milan Cinquecento, the great five-hundred-kilometer road race. Most of the important cars in Europe will be there. Be sure to look me up; we'll have dinner."

So that's why Carlo wanted me there by the sixteenth, she thought as she packed at her hotel. *It sounds like fun. I wonder if he'll be driving.*

The train took Marcy through Nurnburg to Munich, a journey Marcy found fascinating. In the handsome city of Munich, with its old-world charm, she visited the plant of the Falk brothers. While their inexpensive car had some good features, it was a long way from a commercial product. Still, Marcy praised their efforts, encouraged the brothers, and promised to keep in touch.

From Munich, the train cut across the corner of Austria and climbed the mighty Brenner amid the breathtaking grandeur of the Alps. As she watched the scenery, Marcy found that in spite of herself her solitary thoughts turned again to the tragedy of Jacques Demaret. She could not

find in her heart any guilt for his death, yet she was burdened by an immense sadness.

Through the Dolomites, the train came to Venetia and crossed past Bolzano, along the shores of Lake Garda until it reached Verona. There Marcy changed trains, and rode through lovely Italian scenery to Brescia, and beyond across the flat Lombardy plain to Milan. She waited in the sooty station until she could board the eastbound local. At last, weary, travel-stained, Marcy stepped down to the gritty platform at the Novara station.

"Carlo!" she cried. Dropping her train case, she ran to the tanned, handsome, smiling man who was Count Carlo Ferroni. He gathered her into strong arms, and Marcy's lips met his in an ardent, heartfelt kiss of longing.

CHAPTER VI

Marcy walked through the depot building with Carlo, his arm unabashedly around her waist. She thrilled to the warm sense of rapport she had with this handsome man. It seemed as if she had never been away from him, that it was only yesterday that she had seen him instead of four years ago.

Carlo held the door of his Vinca open for her, tossed in her luggage, and cranked the engine into life. He drove down a street of ancient buildings in this very old town, so full of character, so uniquely Italian.

"I have engaged a room for you at a very nice pension," he told her. "I am devastate that I cannot put you up at the old Ferroni *castello*, but once again I have rented it for the season to some very wealthy English." He grinned at her and shrugged. "Why they want to live in that great draughty ruin with the leaky roof I cannot guess. But they do, and I can use their money very well."

He took one hand from the wheel and covered her hand. "Oh, it is so good to see you once more, Marcy. Since that time in England four years ago, I have missed you every day."

"Carlo, you're sweet," she said. "I too have been counting the days until we meet again. Note that I've proven that. I've come ahead of time."

"Because you are curious about my great surprise? Marcy, this will be a fine thing, for Carlo Ferroni, for the Vinca, and even for Tarrant Motors."

"May I guess, Carlo? The Milan Cinquecento?"

He looked at her in surprise. "Are you clairvoyant?"

Laughing, she said, "Not quite. Prince Rupert of Saxe-Coburg was shipping his Saxon-Benz here. So I put two and two together."

"Yes, I saw him and Anton Mueller yesterday, taking a trial run. He has a fine car. But the competition, Marcy—the best cars, the top professional drivers in all of Europe will be here for this five hundred kilometers. If I can win, what a feather in the hat of Carlo Ferroni! How everyone will want then a Vinca. You agree?"

She thought for a moment. "Yes, the Vinca would be in all the headlines. You must win, Carlo. I will be watching and cheering you to victory."

"Better than that," he said "Marcy, remember the race from Luton to Peterborough? You were my luck, my mascot. And you know cars and engines. Will you ride mechanic with me in this race?"

"I'm your girl!" Marcy cried, delighted. "I'm like Charles Rolls, I love speed. I never told Daddy, but I once had one of our Vincas up to seventy miles an hour, on a straight stretch near Palo Alto. But what machine, Carlo? Surely, surely not this one."

He laughed heartily. "So, you see the bent mudguards, the bonnet held on by straps, the crease in the rear body. No, Marcy, this is my old reliable I use for running errands, for hauling material, everything. In the Cinquecento, we ride in my newest Vinca, very powerful, very special. It has some new features invented by Sig. Carlo Ferroni. They make you blink your eyes, you bet."

He stopped the car in front of a lovely tall house, the window ledges at every floor bright with petunias and geraniums. "The pension," he said. "Signora Lucchesi will take good care of you. So, you have dinner with me tonight? We will have the genuine Italian cuisine at a fine restaurant run by my cousin Roberto Carnesi. He is Kitti's older brother. Roberto is most famous *cuoco*, chef, that is. I come for you—" he looked at his watch, "eight o'clock? We will have good pasta, good red wine, good talk. You tell me about Tarrant Motors, about San Francisco, about my sweet cousin Kitti, in England. I tell you about Vinca, and Novara, and the double-damned Syndicalists. Why, we will talk away the sunset, and talk the moon and stars out of the sky, eh?"

"A program I couldn't improve upon, Carlo," she said.

The landlady, Signora Lucchesi, was a mountainous Lombard lady of middle age, fired with boundless energy. She had little English, about the equivalent of Marcy's Italian, yet they got along famously. She fussed about Marcy's spotlessly clean room, straightened a curtain, plumped the pillows on the high bed with its bright comforter, lowered the window sash a quarter of an inch. Effortlessly, she lifted Marcy's suitcase onto a convenient stand.

"The bathroom, she's down the hall. Soap, towels, you find in washstand. If you like a little snack before you go with Count Carlo to *pranzo*, you come with me. No? Then I go now. Anything you want, you ring with bell, eh?" She

went down the stairs, the very floors shaking to the impact of her weighty stride.

Marcy debated about what to wear, wanting to look pretty for Carlo, yet guessing that his cousin's restaurant would not be a dress-up place. She settled for a pleated silk skirt and a rather severe shirtwaist, over it a fitted jacket of wool with vertical stripes of green and white.

When she came down the stairs at the call of Signora Lucchesi, Carlo stared at Marcy in sheer admiration. "Dear one, you are so beautiful," he said softly. "More beautiful than I remembered. That first time you and I met, in England, you were very pretty, but *ingenue*. Now you are a woman, and beautiful, a woman who has found herself. You have the air of confidence, afraid of nothing, ready for whatever the world should bring you."

Il Ristorante Carnesi occupied the lower level of a very old building. Going down a half-flight of steps from the street, Marcy and Carlo entered a low-ceilinged room, lamplit, its crowded tables covered with the inevitable red-checked table cloths. The air was redolent with garlic, oregano, basil and the pungency of red wine. Suddenly Marcy was ravenous.

A stout, smiling man with a fierce Hussar mustache hurried across the room and clasped Carlo in his arms. When he escaped the bear hug, Carlo said in Italian, his voice affectionate, "Roberto, greet my very dear friend from America, Signa. Marcy Tarrant. I have brought her here to enjoy the food of the best restaurant in all of Italy."

Roberto beamed. "When we found you were coming, Signorina, we prepared a dinner just for you, simple food, but I think you will enjoy it. Come, we have your table ready. Umberto, the aperitif for the signor and signorina, *rapido*!"

Marcy gave Roberto the greetings his sister Kitti had sent with Marcy, and Lady Wolverton's invitation for Roberto and his family to visit Ashdown. They were still chatting about the beautiful Kitti when the drinks arrived.

She and Carlo had hardly finished their Cinzano when the glasses were whisked away, and food began coming in a steady flood. First a delicious *minestrone Rossi* with Parmesan cheese, then *ravioli di ricotta*. Next came spaghetti with clam sauce, *antipasto di scampi*.

Now came the main dish, which Roberto himself served with pride. "*Petti di Tacchino Milanese*," he said. "That is, breasts of turkey in the Milanese style. I hope it pleases you, Signorina." He spooned hot melted butter over the turkey and sifted chopped parsley on top.

It was marvelous food, and Marcy told Roberto so in her limping Italian. She did have some difficulty handling the long slithery strands of the spaghetti, to Carlo's great amusement. Yet to wash it down and to help savor the main course, there was a beautiful sharp Chianti in its wicker-bound bottle.

For dessert, there was *pesche ripiene*, carried from the kitchen flaming blue with brandy, with all the ceremony the delightful peach dish deserved.

At the end, Marcy was replete but happy. She sipped Strega from her liqueur glass, watching Carlo spoon up the last delectable drops of juice from his stuffed peaches. *He's enjoying his food as a little boy does*, she thought. *There is no side, as the British say, no pretense. Not like*—memory flooded upon her with a shock. Could it be only a few nights ago that she had dined with another man in another special dinner? A more pretentious meal, a meal designed to impress her, to pave the way for the next act. And now that man was dead, and in the ground, and she prayed God would have mercy on his soul. Poor Jacques. That last night he was a different man from that blithe spirit, the one she had known on the *Lucania*, and in his opulent setting at Chateau Orient.

Yet there was a tie between Jacques and Carlo, she knew, and it must be discussed. She was hesitant to spoil the gentle peaceful mood of the evening, so she waited until the table had been cleared except for their liqueurs, and Carlo had lighted a long slim cigar with all the care of performing a masculine rite.

"Carlo, you've heard, of course, about Jacques Demaret," she said.

He nodded. "What a sad thing, to be so beaten by the world that one elects to leave it by the crooking of one's finger. I was told of it by M'sieu Hommard, who is the Costain agent in my factory, a very busy, busy man." She caught a trace of bitterness in Carlo's description. "I never met Demaret, though we've had some correspondence."

"I had dinner with Jacques the night before he died," Marcy said. "He was very depressed, about his health, about the way he was being treated at Costain's." She described briefly her dealings with Jacques. In valediction, she said, "I liked him, and it was a terrible shock when I learned he had killed himself. He had many good points, and some bad ones. He was perhaps too fond of women, too ambitious, too volatile. He resented being dominated by his mother, but he did little about it. You know that she is the real head of Costain *Frères?* Carlo, there is danger in that."

"I have sensed a change already in the attitude of M'sieu Hommard toward me," Carlo said, looking contemplatively at the long ash on his cigar. "Please explain, Marcy."

"Mme. Demaret, or *Maman*, as Jacques called her, is a strange, cold woman, a power in Paris financial circles. She hates automobiles, for the threat they pose to the old comfortable life of the French aristocracy of wealth. Also for what his Renault did to her son, I suppose. And she doesn't like me. Four years ago I put in a word to help you get your first factory loan, and she resented my meddling in business, though she did give you the loan. Perhaps Jacques persuaded her. Last week, I spoke for you again, on the renewal, and the new loan for expansion. It may be that I have done you more harm than good."

"I don't think so," Carlo said. "Did Jacques pass along your recommendation?"

"That's just it. He had prepared a memorandum, outlining the Tarrant Motors business, and adding a recommendation that the Ferroni matter be decided favorably. I've taken steps, through a friend in Costain *Frères*, to hold up that memorandum until Madame is more nearly normal after the death of her son. How much that will help I don't know."

"Surely a woman who is all cold business would not hurt her pocketbook because of a grudge," he said. "Ferroni will be a moneymaker for Costain's, if they help me expand. I have the car. I have the market. All I need is production."

"*Maman's* grudge is bigger than you think," Marcy said, frowning. "Besides her obsessive hatred of cars, and her dislike for me, my Aunt Dora—remember, the pretty woman you met at Ashdown?—tolled the Chevalier Moreau away to America and married him. He was the estate manager at Chateau Orient, and served as *Maman's* whipping boy. Jacques told me Madame was furious when the Chevalier pulled up stakes. So all that the Laughlins and the Tarrants have done may come crashing down on your head."

Carlo was silent for some time. Then he looked at her with a thin smile. "Marcy, I appreciate what you have done for me, and I'll be on my guard with the Costains. If they call my loan, deny me the expansion, it will hurt me—hurt? *Dio mio*, it will put me out of business! So I must win this Cinquecento, maybe they will relent then. My people need my factory, Marcy, if I go out of business—" He swung an arm toward the now crowded room.

"They haven't helped much on your delivery schedule," Marcy said pointedly.

"I know, I know. But I have hope that is behind us now. With production improved, with the race-winning Ferroni name, I don't think Mme. Demaret will shut me down."

Marcy stared at him, sorry that she had to say what must be said. "Carlo, you haven't thought things through. *Maman* won't take a big loss like that. She'll just throw you out, bag and baggage. She'll put all her own people in, cheapen the car, squeeze your workmen in her vise of low wages, and ride on your reputation to sell her lousy cars."

He looked appalled. "But Marcy, I have create this beautiful motor car." He thrust out his hands, palms up. "I formed the Vinca with these two hands. She cannot take all that away from me."

"She can and she will, if the need comes," Marcy said grimly. "My hope is that when the memorandum from her son finally reaches her desk, she will accede to it. Otherwise—"

He sat turning his empty glass in his fingers. "This threat turns Roberto's fine food sour in my belly. I took that first loan on hard terms, Marcy. If Costain's calls it now, I will lose everything I have built up, everything. My Ferroni estate too will go to the loansharks, the very sticks and stones of my ancestral heritage gone—gone with the wind. I think I understand a little the despair of Jacques Demaret."

She put a hand quickly over his scarred fist. Fear struck at her like a lurking snake. "Carlo, you wouldn't!" she cried.

With his other hand, he covered hers. He smiled, that warm sincere smile that was Carlo. "Not Carlo Ferroni," he said firmly, gripping her hand tight. "Everything I am would not permit it—my religion, my pride, my confidence in myself. What I have built, Marcy, may tumble in ruins, yet life goes on, and I can build again. A Ferroni is too proud to throw in the sponge after one hard blow, or ten, or a hundred."

"That makes me happy, Carlo," Marcy said. "Carlo, if—if the walls do come tumbling down, think of coming to America. A man of your ability and inventive genius would be welcomed by any number of motor firms, I know."

"Most certainly I will think of that if it comes to that," Carlo said. "But first we will win the Cinquecento, you and I. I will make the name and the genius of Ferroni so important that Mme. Demaret will not dare to pull the rug from under me."

"I hope you're right," Marcy said. She was more skeptical than he of the mercy of the imperious Marie Demaret. "The race is day after tomorrow. What do we do tomorrow?"

"We will take our final practice run over the course," he said. "From that I'll make final adjustments to our Vinca. On race day we'll drive her to Milan for the start at eleven o'clock." He pushed back his chair. "I'm afraid the sun and moon must remain in the sky tonight. Tomorrow will be all work, a long hard day, so I must take you back to the pension. Come, let us heap our compliments on Roberto for that most delicious of meals."

Roberto Carnesi's round face shone like the full moon, and his great mustache quivered at Marcy's compliments. Carlo took bills from a thin sheaf in his wallet and gave them to his cousin, over the evident protests of the restaurateur. As she went out with Carlo, Marcy thought, *What a proud man. Thank God I didn't have the temerity to offer to pay. Carlo would have been crushed.*

As they drove the blue and gold Vinca the seventy-five kilos to Milan in the morning, Marcy asked, "What is the course like?"

"Roughly a triangle, north through the hills to Monza, southwest across the Licino and almost to Novara, then east again on this road to the outskirts of Milan. Total each circuit, one hundred and sixty-seven kilos. We'll make the circuit three times, starting and ending at Milan. My fine crew will have their pit at Milan, ready to change tires, fill Vinca with gas and oil, and make any needed repairs, if possible."

"Five hundred kilometers. That's pretty close to three hundred and ten miles," Marcy said, after a quick mental calculation. "That's a long, long drive, Carlo."

"A test of man and machine," Carlo agreed. "Yet the winner will finish in less than six hours, unless I'm badly mistaken."

"Why, that would be an average of more than fifty miles an hour!" Marcy exclaimed. "Can anyone make such terrific speed?"

"My baby here can," Carlo said, patting the wheel of the purring Vinca. "I will tell you my secret, Marcy. Vinca will not win just because she is fast, but because she is also slow."

"Carlo, I don't understand."

"Vinca has new brakes of my own design, which work on all four wheels. Coming back from England, I think, 'That big Spyker, she drives on all four wheels. Why not make my

Vinca brake on all four wheels?' It takes me nearly four years, but I invent them. So I travel at high speed longer to brake later for turns. There are many turns and hills on this course, as you will see. I think many cars with big names will die like dogs on this course tomorrow."

"Cars, yes. But what of men?" she asked.

"Some men, too, I'm afraid," he said, shaking his head. "The old pros, they should make it. Others are not skilled, they drive with no brains and no fear. Some of the machines are just huge engines with four wheels under them, no design, no finesse, just raw power. That kind, this Milano run will shake them, wreck them, leave them strewn along the course like fallen elephants. In some of them men may die."

She did not like to dwell on that subject. She asked, "What else is new about Vinca?"

He adjusted his goggles and stepped harder on the foot throttle. "You see, I feed gas with the foot, leaving the hands free," he said, as the big car growled pleasantly deep in its throat. Gravel spanged against the mudguards as the countryside slid behind them. "The wheels, I make them with the demountable rims. If a tire goes flat, I take off the old rim and tire, slip on a new rim with tire already inflated. Quick, eh? Also easy. The gas tank, I put underneath, so if I am hit from the rear, it does not rupture the tank."

He pointed a finger at the dash. "Now, mechanic Tarrant, you see that handle? That is the pump for my pressure oil system. You watch the gauge. If it drops below ten pounds, you work that wobble pump until the pressure comes up again."

"It reads eight pounds right now," she said.

He laughed and showed her how to work the wobble pump.

Crossing the Licino River on a stone bridge, the Vinca swept through the Lombardy plain with its grazing sheep and cattle, its trim farmsteads. Ahead, Marcy saw the smokestacks and chimneys of the Milan industrial complex sooting the blue of the summer sky. A hot wind was blowing across the plain, and she saw Carlo's eyes flick anxiously toward the heat indicator. But the liquid column remained well below the red danger mark.

On the outskirts of Milan workmen were piling a barricade of hay bales at the road corner. At the Vinca pit, a few of Carlo's men looked up as the car swept past with

a honk of the horn, and waved at them. Carlo turned onto the north leg of the course, which led its winding way into the hills toward Monza. Though this was only a trial run, Carlo was driving fast, and Marcy thrilled to the lure of speed as the Vinca swept around corners in a spurting cloud of dust.

The road grew steeper. Carlo said, "Fasten your seat belt." Marcy found the strip of webbing fastened to a metal loop at each side of the seat. She buckled it tight across her lap. He added, "Our brakes are so powerful you might be thrown out."

They swept around the vicious turn, broadsiding. As Carlo brought the car out of it, beyond it was a bright red roadster, its nose crumpled against a boulder. There was no one in the car. "A job for the mechanics," Carlo said. "One of the boys tried to take the turn too fast. I hope he got out all right."

The route through the streets of Monza was marked. Carlo followed it at reduced speed, and at the outskirts of the town he turned westerly. He dropped the Vinca down the twisting road to the flat so fast that Marcy's heart was in her mouth. She learned what he had meant about the brakes. On the straights he would hold speed to the last second, then Marcy would be thrust against the restraining strap as he hit the powerful brakes, slowed, and wrenched the Vinca around the bend. In the straight again, she would breathe easier.

The Vinca rumbled across a steel bridge over the Licino. Just beyond there was a thump and a hiss and Carlo cursed softly as he wrestled with the wheel. Without braking, he brought the car to a stop just off the road. "Flat tire," he said. "Mechanic, get out the jack."

Marcy learned now the advantage of Carlo's demountable rims. As she took the car up on the jack. Carlo spun off the several nuts holding rim to wheel. He lifted off the rim, brought a new rim and tire from the rear of the car, and slapped it into place. The nuts were tightened even as Marcy was racking the jack down. As he strapped the bad tire in the back, Marcy saw a large spike protruding from its tread.

"Four minutes flat," Carlo announced in satisfaction as he got behind the wheel again. "What d'you think of my system?"

"It's great. Are you putting it on all Vinca models?"

"Should I? It's expensive."

"But worth it. You're authorized to put the rims on all Tarrant Motor shipments," Marcy said.

"I'll do that." He grinned at her, that boyish, infectious grin. "Hey, redhead, how'd you like to drive a racing car?"

"You mean that?" She did not give him a chance to take back the offer. She slid over as he got out and went around the car to the passenger seat. She strapped the seat belt around her, and he did the same. The driver's seat was adjustable, and he showed her how to move it forward, for it had been far back to accommodate his long legs.

She put the Vinca into low gear and let out the clutch slowly. The big car glided forward and picked up speed. As she went through the gears, the changes went as smooth as oil, and the clutch worked cleanly. They were on the valley floor now, the road stretching straight for a long way until it disappeared into the waver of heat in the August day.

Holding the wheel tightly, Marcy stepped down on the gas pedal. She pulled around a farm cart, leaving its horses shying and snorting. She slowed again to make her way through a small band of sheep. One of the ewes, frightened, almost ran into the Vinca, and the shepherd shook a fist at Marcy as the sheep were left behind.

Now the way was open and she came down hard on the pedal. The Vinca responded with a full-throated growl. The speed picked up. Fields and lanes, walls and fences whipped behind the speeding car. As the speedometer needle climbed, the readings startled Marcy, until she realized the dial was marked in kilometers per hour, not miles. Still, it kept climbing, a hundred, a hundred ten, a hundred twenty kilos per hour. Marcy cried out in sheer delight, thrilled by her mastery of this great metal monster. She had pushed the speed up to a hundred thirty kilos per hour when she heard Carlo call, "Better let up, Marcy. We're coming back to civilization."

She took her foot off the gas pedal and bore down on the brake. Used to the response of other cars she had driven, she almost put both of them over the cowl where the windscreen had been removed for racing purposes. As the seat belt cut into her middle, she understood why Carlo had provided the belts.

More sedately now, she drove through the quiet streets of Novara. She found the street of Sigra. Lucchesi's pension and stopped the Vinca at the curb in front.

She got out, brushing the dust from her long skirt. As

Carlo slid behind the wheel, she asked, "At what time will the old pro pick up his faithful mechanic?"

"At dawn," he said, laughing. "Six o'clock? We'll start at Milano, so I wouldn't want to be late."

"I won't see you tonight?" she asked sadly.

"Much as I hate it, I cannot," he said. "Too many things to do to Vinca, tires, oil change, timing. No little thing must stop Vinca from winning this race for the honor of Ferroni."

"And for the profits which may accrue thereto," Marcy said. She leaned over and kissed him, and saw his hands tighten on the steering wheel, and was pleased.

She went into the house happy with the sunny day, the thrilling ride, the glory of driving the powerful car at a speed of more than eighty miles an hour. In her room, she tossed down her helmet and goggles, and sat down to relax. She reflected, what a different day it had been, so enjoyable, so pleasant to be with Carlo; the ghost of Jacques was fading. She felt like the real Marceline Tarrant once more.

Strange, she thought, *how flexible is the human spirit.* Barry was gone, Jacques was gone, but she was alive and healthy and vibrant with the thought of things to come. She determined to put the sadness of the past behind her, and look with joy to the future.

On that philosophical thought, she went down the street to do some important shopping.

CHAPTER VII

The starting grid for the Milan Cinquecento auto race was a chaos of snorting cars, busy officials, and engrossed mechanics. In the Ferroni pit, Marcy stood aside while Carlo supervised his factory mechanics in the last minute fueling and tune-up of the Vinca, handsome and powerful-looking with its blue and gold trim.

Finally the hood came down, the hold-down straps were buckled, and Carlo stood back, wiping his hands on a rag. "That's the best we can do," he said to Marcy. "It's up to Vinca now."

"She sounds contented and powerful," Marcy said, listening to the soft burble of the engine. "She's mighty pretty, too."

"And so are you," Carlo said, looking at her with frank admiration. "Like that time in England, you make a very handsome boy."

"The judges will not bar me, Carlo, a woman in man's attire?"

"If they question you, just smile at them and they will melt like chocolate drops," he said, laughing. "Tell them you must be dressed practically to change the tire and fill the radiator."

Secretly Marcy was pleased with her unconventional and quite daring attire. On her shopping trip, she had found a pair of cavalry breeches, with doeskin patches at the inside of the knees. Above stout shoes, she wore shiny leather puttees. Her white shirt was a boy's, thus not quite cut to fit her figure, so it was taut against the proud thrust of her bosom. A scarf of a blue to match the car was wound about her throat. A light suede jacket and matching helmet, with wide-vision goggles completed her costume. Now she moved her wide leather belt in another notch in the waist and was ready.

A whistle shrilled through air filled with the fumes of castor oil and burned gasoline. At this warning signal, Carlo and Marcy got into the Vinca and strapped their safety belts. They settled helmets down and goggles into place. Umberto, the chief mechanic, looked at Carlo questioningly. Carlo cocked his head, listening to the rumble of the engine. He

nodded in satisfaction, and as Umberto stepped back, Carlo drove into the Vinca's slot in the grid.

The small cannon that was the starting gun boomed. All along the tree-lined lane on the outskirts of Milan engines roared with power, and the machines surged forward, jockeying for position in a mad scramble. There were more than thirty cars entered, of many makes, driven by most of the professional racers of the Continent.

Carlo sent the Vinca ahead slowly, making no effort to join the mad starting scramble. Two-thirds of the cars were on their way, and the leaders already out of sight, before he eased his car into the road and picked up speed.

"It's a long race, and on a hot day like this, one must baby the car a bit," he told Marcy. "Some of these early leaders will burn their engines out, or wreck themselves on corners."

Nodding agreement, Marcy checked the oil gauge and began to work the wobble pump.

As Carlo had predicted, the carnage in this first of three circuits was awful. They passed a red car that had gone through a fence, the driver standing beside it, looking angrily at a smashed fender and a broken wheel. Next was a yellow car which had shot off the road and slammed into a stone wall. A group of people were working to extricate the driver and mechanic from the wreckage.

"Both amateurs, tyros," Carlo said with an edge of bitterness as the Vinca swept past. "If it was only themselves—but they can easily wreck some skilled driver."

Before they turned the corner at Monza, Marcy had counted six machines out of the race. As they rocketed west down the hill, she saw a big Darracq that had missed a little bridge. The car sat disconsolately in the middle of the stream, the two men sitting on the back of the seats to keep their feet dry as the water rose higher. "Number seven," Marcy said, laughing.

An older model Panhard was limping along, spewing blue smoke, and Carlo passed it. Next came a Sizaire-Naudin, canted oddly because one of its transverse leaf springs had let go. Now the Vinca thundered across the iron bridge over the Licino. Carlo poured the gas to the car as they found the long straight where Marcy had driven the day before. They passed car after car, a Bugatti, two Fiats, a Mercedes, and a Dutch Spyker. Marcy caught herself holding her breath as Carlo brought the speedometer past one hundred, then one hundred twenty and one hundred thirty kilometers per hour.

She realized that Carlo and his men had the Vinca tuned

like a fine watch. Under his skilled driving, the car hummed along, taking the bumps and holes in the road without swerving. Marcy clenched her teeth at the constant jarring, but said nothing. But seeing her discomfort, Carlo shouted, "We must keep the springing stiff so she handles well on corners."

They came into the Novara corner. Carlo rode brake and clutch, gearing down just before they reached the turn. The Vinca took the corner in a wild slide, almost against the barrier of hay, sending a great plume of dust spiraling into the air. The crowd of spectators behind the barrier scattered.

"Damned idiots!" Carlo growled as he caught the slide and straightened the Vinca out on the third leg. "If I nearly let the Vinca get away from me, some other driver may go straight into that hay, and someone will get killed. Marcel Renault was killed in the same kind of accident a couple years ago, but the people forget that. They're afraid they'll miss something."

He raced past a big, powerful Mors, and a handsome Gobron-Brillié, easily leaving them behind. At the Milan corner, Carlo braked and let the car roll into the Ferroni pit. Marcy got out for a short stretch, and Carlo watched Umberto and his men add fuel, check oil and water, and change one of the Michelin tires, which had a stone bruise.

As they were finishing, Marcy asked, "How many cars ahead?"

"Five, maybe six," Umberto said, not looking up. He tightened the last nut on the rim. "There you are, boss. See you the next time around."

"I'll want the other three tires changed then," Carlo said, vaulting into the driver's seat. Marcy, feeling refreshed by the short stop, hurried to climb in. She was still fastening her safety belt when the Vinca roared out onto the highway and stormed north toward Monza.

Carlo was driving at a faster pace now, cornering the Vinca sharply into the abrupt turns. As the road climbed, they passed a big green car off to the side, its bonnet up, two men throwing dirt on the flaming engine. Marcy squeezed the bulb of the horn as the Vinca shot by, but neither man looked up at the raucous sound.

"One of the new Fiats," Carlo said, working brake and throttle. They leaned sideways, taking an abrupt turn. "Imagine, Marcy, a hundred and ten horsepower. That could win a lot of races if the car holds together. That one had a rod through the crankcase, or I miss my guess."

The hot day and the high speeds were taking their toll. Traffic was not nearly so heavy. As they slowed through Monza, they saw a de Dietrich sitting ludicrously halfway up the steps of a church. The great yellow car, one of those Carlo called "an engine on wheels," had lost its brakes on a turn. A body lay beside the car, and Marcy caught a glimpse of a cassocked priest standing beside it. Then they were past, jolting over the cobbles, squealing into the turn that led toward the iron bridge over the Licino.

Instead of faltering, the Vinca was improving as the race went on. When they reached the long straightaway toward the Novara corner, they found the road ahead empty. Carlo pushed down the gas pedal until the speedometer crept past one hundred forty to one hundred fifty kilos per hour.

Marcy made a quick calculation. "Carlo, that's ninety-three miles an hour," she cried above the rush of air.

He laughed with the sheer intoxication of speed. "Next time around we'll try for a hundred!" he shouted. But she noticed that this time he braked and downshifted fifty yards earlier than before. The Vinca slid around the corner with plenty of room inside the hay barrier. She heard hearty applause from the spectators as Carlo straightened the car out and dropped the corner behind them.

At the pit stop, they learned the reason for the applause. "Only two cars ahead now," Umberto told them as he and his men worked frantically to change tires and add oil and fuel to the car. "A French Brasier, we think, and a German car, the Saxon-Benz. They have you by about—let's see, four minutes."

"We'll catch them," Carlo said. As the hood came down and was strapped, Carlo waved a hand and let out the clutch. "Hang on, Marcy!" he cried. "We're on our way."

They caught the Brasier halfway to Monza. But the French driver did not intend to let the Vinca pass. He hogged the road on the straight stretches, and slid into the corners in dust clouds that slowed the following driver. Carlo growled a few curses, but kept his temper. Admirably, Marcy thought, for her own temper was flaring. Then Carlo's patience was rewarded by the Brasier's driver losing control on a wide turn, which allowed Carlo to shoot the Vinca to the inside and leave the Frenchman sputtering in a dustcloud.

"I wonder how he likes it!" Marcy said, gloating. Carlo grinned as he straightened the Vinca and was gone.

The yellow de Dietrich was still on the steps of the church in Monza, but the crowd was gone.

The Vinca rocketed down the long slope toward the bridge. Marcy saw a dust plume ahead, which must be marking the Saxon-Benz. The car seemed to be operating well, and the driver, who must be Otto Mueller, seemed highly skilled. Carlo had edged the Vinca within a hundred yards of the speeding German car on the twisting road that dropped toward the Licino. Then a rear tire on the Saxon-Benz blew. The car spun once, twice in a cloud of dust. It lurched off the roadside, and slammed backward into a farmer's stone wall.

Carlo hit the brakes, throwing Marcy hard against her restraining strap. Yellow tongues of flame sprang up from the rear of the Saxon-Benz. With strange cogency, Marcy remembered the argument she had had with Prince Rupert and Herr Landstaff about the protection of that tank.

"Carlo, they're afire," she called sharply.

He brought the Vinca to a stop off the road, well back of the German car. In an instant he and Marcy had leaped from the Vinca and were running. As they reached the other car, Carlo jerked his jacket off. "Get the men out," he said, and began beating at the flames with his wadded jacket.

Marcy saw that the two goggled figures were still sitting dazedly in their seats, their belts fastened. As she reached them, the driver began to fumble ineffectually at his buckle. She reached in and freed it for him. She slapped him on the shoulder and jerked a thumb: the gesture meaning "out!" As he clambered down she hurried around the front to help the other man. She freed his belt, and dragged him free with all her lithe strength.

"Get them away from the car!" Carlo shouted. Marcy put an arm around each of the men and helped them in a stumbling run as far as the Vinca. They leaned against the nose of the Vinca, still dazed. Carlo came running now, his wadded jacket a smoking ruin, one of his shirt sleeves charred and black.

He had hardly reached the Vinca when there came a loud "Whoof!" and the entire rear of the car was enveloped in flames. Even at this distance they could feel the heat of the fire.

"There went your gas tank," Carlo said to the Germans. "I tried to put it out, but it was no go."

The younger man, alert again, pushed his goggles up on his forehead, revealing a ludicrous patch of white on a face begrimed with dust and smoke. Now the mechanic unbuckled

the chin strap of his helmet and pulled helmet and goggles free.

"Prince Rudolph!" Marcy cried. "Are you all right?"

"Why, it's Frl. Tarrant," the prince exclaimed. "I'm sore in body, and even more sore in spirit. But nothing broken, thank God. Are you, Otto?"

"I'll be fine," the driver said in German. "But Your Highness, our beautiful car."

"Next time I'll listen when a pretty girl tells me to build my car in a safer manner," the prince said ruefully. "Thank God you came along, for we were both dazed. And the fire—" He shook his head, then jerked it. "But you must go now, you must not lose because of us. We'll be all right, send help for us when you can. Go now, go, go!"

"You're sure you are all right?" Carlo persisted.

"Yes, yes, you must beat that contemptible pig in the Brasier," the prince said.

At that moment the big Brasier came plunging down the hill, and swept past in a swirl of dust, making no effort to stop for the burning car. There was even a disdainful "hoot-hoot" of its horn as it swept around the corner toward the steel bridge.

The prince pushed Marcy firmly toward the Vinca. "Hurry, hurry. You must beat that man," he said.

Marcy started toward the passenger side, but Carlo stopped her. "Marcy, you'll have to drive," he said, holding out his hands. Marcy gasped. Under the soot the hands were red and angry, with great water blisters on palms and fingers. "Not as bad as they look, but I must get to a doctor," he said. "So one in Milan is as close as any." He grinned at her, and her heart leaped at the selfless courage of this man.

She buckled his seat belt on the passenger side, then took the driver's seat. Anton Mueller spun the crank, and the Vinca roared into life. As she put the car into gear, the two Germans called *"Viel glück!"* She waved, let out the clutch, and the powerful car leaped ahead.

They shot down the incline to the steel bridge, Marcy worrying about Carlo's burns. Carlo watched the road and the instruments, giving her a word of advice or encouragement from time to time. His voice was calm.

But Marcy was angry now. Like Prince Rupert, she thought. Nothing would serve but to defeat that Frenchman in the Brasier. So when the car had rumbled across the bridge, she turned into the straight and hit the throttle. As the car picked up speed, she found to her dismay that she

did not have the sheer nerve to bring the car up to the ultimate speed.

Biting her lip, she glanced at Carlo. She saw the calm face blackened by smoke, the red, blistered hands. Then in spite of pain, he reached down and worked the wobble pump to raise the oil pressure. A wave of courage seemed to flow from him to Marcy. She gritted her teeth and pushed down on the accelerator, harder, harder. She flicked a glance at the speedometer. It moved up to a hundred fifty kilos. Then the road flattened. She drew a deep breath and jammed her foot down. The needle went on to the right, now a hundred fifty-five—a hundred fifty-eight—a hundred sixty and finally a hundred sixty-two kilos per hour. The pedal was clear to the floorboards.

Her whole being was concentrated on the road. Her hands were clenched on the steering wheel. The terrain slid behind them in a formless streak. Then Carlo called calmly, "That's just over a hundred miles an hour, Marcy. Time to back off and start to brake. We're coming to the Novara corner."

Marcy fairly stood on the brake pedal. The mighty brakes of the Vinca brought the car screaming and fishtailing down from the wild speed. She double-clutched and dropped the gears down a notch, then another She still came into the Novara corner too fast, but she held against the skid and manhandled the car around. The rear end caught a huge sheaf of the protective barrier, and the spectators ran for their lives. Then the Vinca was around, and rushing toward the stone bridge over the Licino. Marcy geared up and gained speed. She stole a look at Carlo.

He was smiling through the pain of his burns. "I couldn't have done better myself, Marcy. Now let's go after that Frenchman."

They caught up with the Brasier only three miles from the finish line. The Vinca crept up inexorably, and with the pollard poplars at the finish line in sight, Marcy drew up to pass. The French car swerved. She tried the other side, and the Brasier blocked her Desperately she poured on the gas, pulling right up to the rear wheel of the French car. The other driver swerved, swerved again. Metal screeched as the front fender of the Vinca bumped the rear of the Brasier. Teeth set in anger, Marcy was about to drive the Vinca right through the car ahead, when Carlo said, "Back it off, Marcy. We're running out of road."

She came down hard on the brake pedal, and the tires screamed as they took the inertial momentum of the speeding

car. She dropped the car down one gear, swearing as the Brasier pulled away, and the goggled face of the riding mechanic looked back with a triumphant grin.

Then they were at the finish line, and the Brasier shot under the checkered flag so fast the driver couldn't make the turn. Hay bales went flying, people screamed and ran. One of the tall poplars shook as the Brasier clipped its trunk, lost a wheel, spun around twice and stopped, against a smashed fence.

Marcy braked to a stop at the Ferroni pit and jumped out. She reached down and picked up a tire iron. She started across the road to where the Brasier sat on three wheels.

Carlo's arm blocked her. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm going over there and kill me a Frenchman," she said through clenched teeth. "That was our race, and that God-damned roadhog cheated us out of it."

In spite of his own disappointment, Carlo's laugh was genuine. "Hold everything, darling. Remember that all is fair in love, war, and road racing. Some day M'sieu Therion's sins will catch up with him, and they'll put what's left of him under a neat stone that says 'R.I.P.' So let the good Lord and nature take care of that man. We must send help to Prince Rupert and Mueller, then find a doctor to treat my hands."

Marcy sighed. "Of course, Carlo. I suppose second place is better than nothing, after all."

"No place is as good as first," Carlo said. "But Prince Rupert and the judges will broadcast the behavior of M'sieu Therion, and the people of the racing fraternity will give our Ferroni the credit it deserves. Come along, sweetheart, these hands of mine are beginning to give me plain hell."

After the doctor at the emergency tent had cleaned Carlo's burns, drained the blisters, and applied soothing ointment, his pain was greatly alleviated. Marcy breathed a sigh of relief when the doctor said none of his burns were more than second-degree. As they left, Carlo held up his hands, with their swathing of white gauze. "These, I think, will be as good as new in a few days."

"Not well enough to work with," she protested.

"By heavens, you are right, Marcy," he said. "I think I work too hard too long, anyhow. Listen to me. You do not sail from Genoa for a whole week. I think I take my first vacation in four years. I show you Lombardy, and the Alps, maybe Padua, maybe Venice. You see the real *Italia*."

"And your factory?"

He shrugged, then smiled at her. "For one week I don't

care. Maybe my factory burn down. Maybe *Maman* Demaret take it over to make harness bits and wheelbarrows. Still I will not care. Will you come with me, my dear Marcy?"

"I think I've been waiting all my life for this," she said sincerely She got into the driver's seat of the rested Vinca. "Today I drove a motor car one hundred miles an hour. Tomorrow I'll see the glories of north Italy —with you."

They had dinner that night with Prince Rupert of Saxe-Coburg and Anton Mueller, his driver, at the Ristorante Carnesi. Carlo had difficulty handling knife and fork, but he managed with Marcy's help. The dining room was permeated by the subtle aromas of garlic and onion and thyme, but the air was filled with the talk of shop, of the Milan Cinquecento, of engines and running gear and brakes. Prince Rupert thanked them again for their prompt assistance at the accident scene, and again expressed his bitterness toward Therion, the French driver. "There should be some way to bar pigs like him from racing," the prince said.

"Some day there will be strict rules and regulations, and enough judges to police the course," Carlo said. He opened his mouth for a forkful of spaghetti that Marcy, more practiced now, held up to it.

"This young lady," the prince went on, "is a phenomenon, Herr Ferroni. If her advice had come sooner, I might be richer by one racing motor car. Fräulein, from now on all Saxon-Benz cars will have a protected gas tank."

After a satisfying meal, which Prince Rupert insisted on paying for, and long, long satisfying talk, Marcy and Carlo said good night to the prince and Anton Mueller. In front of the restaurant, Umberto, Carlo's chief mechanic, was waiting for them in a Vinca touring car, to drive them home.

Carlo touched the shiny black hood with a bandaged hand. "I built this baby for a wealthy railroad magnate in Milan," he said. "But Giolitti and the Syndicalists did him in. He ended up without a railroad or a mansion or a Vinca tourer. So she's left in my hands."

"She's a beauty, Carlo," Marcy said as she got in. "Send her to America with your next Tarrant shipment."

"If there is a next Tarrant shipment," he said gloomily. Then he brightened. "But I forget, we have just come in second in the Milano Cinquecento, and I am on vacation. Tomorrow Umberto brings this car with me in it to your house. You put your suitcase in the back with mine; you take the wheel. You will be my chauffeur. We start out whatever hour we wish. We eat when we are hungry; we stop when we

are tired. If our mood is for red wine, we drink red wine. If our mood is for liebfräumilch, why, we drink that. We pick flowers in the fields; we listen to the birds. What say you, my wonderful redhead?"

"Carlo, it sounds like heaven," Marcy declared. "I feel adventurous and relaxed. My only provision is that you get me to Genoa by the twenty-fourth when the *Andrea del Sarto* sails for America."

Carlo was silent as Umberto got in after cranking the Vinca. Then he said softly, "Perhaps after such a week in Italy you will not care if you ever go back to America."

CHAPTER VIII

The black Vinca, with Marcy driving, thrummed through the brightest of summer weather, that weather for which northern Italy is justly famous. The route led north over fine roads to Como. Carlo, sitting beside her, perfectly relaxed, told her of the history, the wars and skirmishes, the legends and the superstitions of the picturesque country through which they were passing.

"So nice to have a chauffeur," he said, leaning back, his long legs outstretched. "With you driving, I am a free spirit, like a schoolboy reprieved from classes on a saint's day. I am not sure the philosophers are right when they say a man must work hard to gain the rewards of life. Perhaps it is just as well to accept the small favors of life and enjoy them."

"But you have worked hard, Carlo," she protested.

"Yes, and it has brought me little beyond more work and more worry."

"Not altogether, dear man. You have had the joy of creating, of turning your thoughts into steel and rubber and glass. But I agree that you have worked too hard. Our saying is 'All work and no play makes Carlo a dull boy.' "

"You are right. I find myself staring at a pretty girl and instead of thinking how sweet her kisses would taste, I wonder if she needs her spark plugs cleaned and her carburetor adjusted."

Marcy laughed in delight. "Well, Carlo, I must admit that some of your Lombard beauties have very nice carburetors. But this flesh-and-blood woman does not run on gasoline. I'm hungry."

After lunch at a village inn, they drove on to Como, where they found a suite of two bedrooms with connecting bath in a picturesque inn on a hilltop overlooking the blue lake. Marcy was pleased with the wide balcony, bright with potted flowers. That evening they dined in the pleasant small dining room, on a menu of leek soup, chicken cacciatore, tender new asparagus, and strawberries in thick cream. Marcy helped Carlo cut his food, and she poured the fine red wine of the country from its carafe.

Afterward, in the soft summer night, they sat on the balcony, looking out over the waters of Como, dark now. The surface reflected the lights along the shore, the long lances of arc lights, the star points of other buildings.

Marcy sighed with contentment. "Carlo *mio,* we are detached from all the world," she said. "Our troubles, our worries, the perils and headaches of the world, are far away and of small consequence."

"Next week will be soon enough to furrow our brows with the wrinkles of worry, dear Marcy. For this whole week we will live each moment as it catches us."

So with voices slow and gentle, they talked of many things, of Italy and America, of parents and children, of families and life, of food and religion. Marcy learned that in his own way Carlo was a deeply religious man, though not ostentatious in his exercise of it.

Three things they avoided—politics, death, and motor cars. *Why turn to serious subjects,* Marcy wondered, *which would shatter tonight's marvelous mood? Perhaps it is cowardly not to meet realities squarely—but who knows whether what we call realities are merely figments, and this happiness is the reality?*

The hour had grown late. The muted sounds of work deep within the inn had ceased. Now a gentle night breeze sprang up, rustling the shrubbery below the balcony. It sent a little chill along Marcy's arms, bare in her light summer dress. Carlo felt it also, for he said, "Even fine moments pass, Marcy. It grows cool. Let us go in."

They stood up. Marcy, facing Carlo, put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him sweetly. "I hate to go," she said. "But I am weary, and my shoulders ache from my driving in the race yesterday, and the easier drive today."

He hesitated before answering. She could see the faint shine of his eyes in the dim light. He said, "Marcy, a most embarrassing thing. I find buttons are almost impossible to manage with these paws of mine. Could you—?"

"Help you get undressed? Of course," she said.

As he sat on the edge of the bed in his room, she unbuttoned his shirt and took it off. She slipped the singlet over his head, revealing a corded, muscular torso in the yellow lamplight. Rummaging in his valise she found a voluminous nightshirt of flannel. She unbuckled his belt, unbuttoned the fly of his trousers, and slipped the nightshirt over his head. She untied his shoes and took them off, and stripped off his socks.

"There you are," she said. "I think you can manage the rest."

"That I can," he said, but he was staring into her eyes with a burning intensity. She felt herself blushing as the pink tip of his tongue touched his lips, as if they were dry.

I know what he wants to say, she thought, *and I know what I want him to say.* But he was not like Paul, nor Jacques; Carlo was not sure of the protocol, the tender words this situation required. Even the animals, Marcy thought, had their courting games, with moves and countermoves. She knew she had to help Carlo.

Sitting beside him, she put her palms gently on his cheeks. Turning his face toward her, she kissed him full on the lips, long and ardently. Then she broke away and stood up.

"I'm going to get ready for bed, Carlo," she said. "Then I'll come back to see if there is anything more I can do for you." She smiled warmly.

In her bedroom she undressed quickly. She went into the bathroom, and brushed her teeth. She touched her favorite perfume to her earlobes and between her breasts. She hurried to finish her toilette, feeling a rising impatience, a longing that had been mounting all day at Carlo's nearness. The desire tugging at her was irresistible, nor did she want to resist.

She left her nightdress lying on her bed, and slipped a soft corduroy robe around her trim body. In bare feet she padded back to Carlo's room. He was in bed. His eyes welcomed her. His lips were smiling gently. The oil lamp in the sconce on the wall was still burning.

Looking down at him, she asked, "You're all right, Carlo?"

"I would be if—" he said softly. Then he reached out and caught her hand. "Don't go, dear one. Blow out the lamp and come to me. The feeling I have for you—your kisses are warm and sweet, your embrace shakes my soul. But that is not enough, the way my love for you burns within me like a furnace."

Marcy smiled at him, pleased at the old-fashioned sentimentality of his expression. Without answering, she went to the wall lamp and blew it out. She came back to the bed in the velvety darkness, and let her robe drop from her shoulders. Lifting the covers, she slipped into bed beside him, careful not to hurt his burned hands. Turning, she faced him, pressing breasts to chest, thigh to thigh. She slid the hem of his nightshirt up toward his muscular torso.

His skin was pleasantly warm, and the faint man smell of him sent wave after wave of longing through Marcy's body.

For the most fleeting of moments, she was swept by a memory of another body, scar-ridged, chill with faded energy, near her so lately, yet so long ago. She thrust the thought aside as she moved her hand along Carlo's flat abdomen and the smooth slope of his side and hip.

"Marcy, Marcy!" Carlo cried. He moved to touch the taut breasts with the bared flesh of his wrist, and the touch brought breathlessness to her urgency. "These paws of mine," he whispered. "You'll have to help, dear one."

"With the greatest of delight," she said softly, and with her own hand did what his bandaged hands could not.

Marcy awoke in the gray dawn to the sound of birds cheeping and roosters crowing afar off. She was snuggled against the warmth of Carlo, for the room was cool with the night air through the open window and she was naked. She moved to get up without disturbing him, but she saw his eyes open, crinkling with pleasure. One bandaged hand restrained her nude body.

She turned toward him then, smiling, and they made love again, gently but ardently, passion mounting to a satisfaction Marcy had never known before. *Carlo is so gentle*, she thought, so considerate, so wonderful. How different from the almost . . . automatic expertise of a Jacques that was no more or that of a Paul Costain.

They lay in a pleasant embrace, not talking, thinking thoughts of calm delight. Now from below came a mutter of talk, a clink of silver, the bang of a dropped kettle. Somewhere a dog barked at the sunrise, not angrily, merely making a statement that he was alive this day. *As we are*, Marcy thought, *and since we are, we can't lie in bed all day, though it might be fun.*

She kicked off the covers and arose, not hurrying, catching the appreciation in Carlo's look as he took in the trim womanliness of her nude body. Suddenly embarrassed, she snatched up her robe and fled to her own bedroom.

Later, they breakfasted on eggs Benedict and café espresso, topped by sweet black cherries pitted and served in cream flavored with marrasquin. After breakfast, they got into the Vinca and Marcy drove into Como town, where with some difficulty they found a vendor to fill Vinca's tank with gasoline and add a half-liter of motor oil to the crankcase.

That morning they explored the shore bounding the blue waters of Como, with the scarp of the Bergamasque Alps towering to the northeast. The beautiful snow-clad peaks were faithfully mirrored in the lake waters, whose still surface

was rippled and wrinkled only now and then by some startled waterfowl or the clumsy dory of a fisherman.

Marcy drove leisurely and stopped often, for the day was perfect, warm but not too warm, the air as pellucid and clear as Baccarat crystal. The songs of birds shivered through the crowding trees.

They lunched at a pleasant little café at Chiasso, taking their time, their gentle talk marked by silences more eloquent than words. Afterward Marcy drove by a different route back to their inn at Lake Como. There Marcy renewed the dressings on Carlo's burns, and was pleased that they were healing nicely: "Much less painful now," he told her, so she made the new bandages lighter than the old.

Relaxed and happy, they dined on the terrace overlooking the blue lake, choosing scallopine Milanese, stuffed zucchini, spaghetti with oil and garlic, and a very dry red wine. For dessert they had zabaglione and small glasses of Strega.

After dinner they strolled hand in hand through the garden of the inn, watching the changing sunset colors over lake and mountains, listening to the evening song of the birds, and enjoying the cool sweet odors of mignonette and datura and verbena. Before the last glow of sunset had faded, they went up to their suite, where they made love blissfully and without hurry. Thereafter Marcy slept well, as innocent as a child and as happy.

Marcy drove them back to Novara the next day, where Carlo refused to go near the factory, but called (with some difficulty) on the telephone to Umberto, to tell him where to pick up the Vinca. Marcy went with Carlo to his doctor, who seemed very pleased with the progress of healing. He dressed the hands again with light bandages, and left off the oiled-silk outer layer which had kept air from the burns.

A toss of a coin set their next destination as Padua, and Marcy and Carlo took a sleek, fast express train to that historic city. They visited museums, art centers, churches, and the many curious and interesting shops. They took rooms in an ancient and somewhat inconvenient hotel, where they made love again, with tenderness and delight.

The week was shrinking with alarming speed, Marcy thought. She had hoped to go to Venice, but the weather turned rainy. Low-hanging clouds brought a soberness to the euphoria she and Carlo had enjoyed so far. So instead of going to Venice, they took a train west to Parma, where they spent a day before going back to Novara. Marcy remembered little of Parma, except that the rain was pouring

down, and she and Carlo made most satisfactory love in their room in a small hotel with pink walls and a stuffed eagle over the door.

With a terrible sadness, Marcy acknowledged that their joyous interlude was ending. Carlo made an impassioned plea for Marcy to marry him, stay in Italy, and take her place on his factory staff, threatened though it was. The temptation was almost more than she could bear, for she was deeply in love with Carlo, so deep she did not know how she would survive without him. It was out of the question for him to go to America, for the fate of the Ferroni factory, on which the lives of so many of his people depended, depended on him. If he gave it up, the whole business would fall into ruin.

"Please, dearest, stay," he implored, taking her hands in his. "I love you, I need you. If you leave, life will be a barren desert. We can be married right away, for I still have one small house on a hectare of stony ground left from the estate, not mortgaged. We could live there. The factory—"

Marcy shook her head. "Carlo, my very dear, you are twisting me up with pain inside, but I can't do it." There was desperation in her voice. "My father is growing older, and he needs me. Our business of Tarrant Motors needs me, and I too have others dependent on me. But most of all there is my small son, Tommy. He has no father, so I am mother and father to him. Carlo, Carlo, I vowed when I took him for my own I would never, never abandon him, as I had seen others abandoned. I cannot break that vow, though it means parting from the man I love."

He bowed his head above their clasped hands. When he looked up, there were tears in his eyes. "I am selfish, to ask you to give up your so-small boy, your *padre,* your business. This I understand, for we Italians have a strong sense of family. What can we do? You could bring the child here, perhaps—" Then he shook his head. "No, there is your *padre* too, and he loves the little boy. It would not work."

He looked at her, and spread his hands in a gesture of despair. He gave Marcy a wan smile. He plucked a snowy handkerchief from his breast pocket and brushed away the tears which had welled from her green eyes. "Maybe it will work out one day. We must depend on time and the good God to bring a solution. Yet it is a hard and a bitter thing, dear Marcy, to let you go."

"You think—you think it's easy for me?" Marcy sobbed, and flung herself into his arms.

As the train for Genoa pulled out of the Novara station,

Marcy kept her tears back, though it was with desperate sadness that she watched Carlo walk along the platform, waving at her, walking faster and faster until he was running. At the end of the platform, as the train gained speed, he stopped, and he waved his white handkerchief until a bend in the track blocked him from Marcy's sight. She settled back into her seat, holding back the tears, but ready to cry, for she felt utterly lost and forlorn.

Her passage home on the *Andrea del Sarto* proved fast, comfortable, and completely dull. A few would-be lotharios tried to get into Marcy's good graces, but with those memories of Carlo so fresh, other men seemed gauche and shallow. She was almost rude in repelling them. She did the proper number of turns around the deck every day; she dined with pleasure on the excellent Italian cuisine. But she shunned the social evenings and the deck games, for she was not in the mood for other people. She honed her Italian with books from the ship's library, went to bed early, and dreamed of those days with Carlo.

When she landed in New York she had a day with Evelyn Harkins, who had returned the week before. Evelyn had enjoyed her summer in Scotland, and had met one young man with definitely romantic notions. She had studied hard, and come home with a new knowledge of the Empire and its antiquities.

Over lunch at Rector's, Evelyn confided, "The main problem I must reconcile myself to, Marce, is that we are such a young, new country. We are so active, we must do things in a big way and in a hurry. Over there everyone moves leisurely. They're ruled by tradition; they do things the way their forefathers did them. I'm not entirely sold on that way, either. But no need to tell you that, you saw it at Ashdown, and no doubt many times on the Continent. But that's enough about me. What adventures did you have?"

Marcy told her, eliding much of the tragedy of Jacques, but quite expansive about the Milan Cinquecento and the delightful week in northern Italy with Carlo.

When she was through, Evelyn looked at her shrewdly. "You've got quite a case on your handsome Italian count, haven't you, dear? He sounds quite devastating."

"He is," Marcy said. "But what will come of it is in the lap of the gods. We're both bound by the straitjacket of circumstance; my responsibilities keep me in America, his tie him to Italy. So only God knows how it will fare." She

stopped, the subject was becoming painful. "Listen, Ev, come out and visit me next summer, or whatever. We'd have a great time. I can find a good many eligible bachelors who would be happy to squire a pretty girl like you."

"If I could come Christmas—no, that's out. I've got to go to Syracuse. I'll give it some thought, Marce. You know I have my own bachelor in Dundee, who threatens to come to America and marry me and take me back to the land of the kilt and the haggis."

"Do you like him that well?" Marcy asked bluntly.

Evelyn laughed. "Oh, I can't make up my mind about Donnie. He's a sweet guy, and well-heeled. He's sincere enough, too. But I don't think I'm in love with him. Our cultures are so different. I like to live free and easy, but he's all tradition, all the honor of the clan, and high ceremonial for its own sake. I doubt if I'd ever learn to fit in. And their damned cold houses—it's easy to see why Scotland excels in the making of woolens and sweaters. They have to."

When Marcy's train arrived at the terminal in Oakland across the Bay, Thomas Tarrant was there to meet her, with him Lulu Leghorn and little Tommy. Marcy was amazed how much the lad had grown in the three months she had been gone. She picked him up, hefting the weight of his chubby body. She nuzzled against his neck, smelling the clean sweet smell of his young flesh. Tommy giggled, then he struggled to be put down, and ran to grasp his grandfather's hand.

"Come along, young man," Tom Tarrant said. "Your mother and I have a thousand things to talk about, so let's get on our ferry and go home across the water."

"Hoo-oot! Hoo-oot!" Tommy imitated the ferry whistle, and taking Marcy's hand at the other side, he skipped and hopped between them up the ferry ramp.

The following week the Tarrant Motors staff had a formal meeting to hear about Marcy's trip. From her voluminous notes she gave a full report. The parts arrangement with Luton Machine, her talks with Charles Rolls, the financial arrangements with Costain *Frères*. With some dramatic license, she described for them the Milan Five Hundred Kilometers.

"You mean after Ferroni was hurt you drove that car?" her father asked. "How did you come out?"

"We came in second, but we would have been first if a

stupid, pigheaded Frenchman hadn't fouled us. He beat us by a hair."

"How did the Vinca run?"

"It was marvelous. Dad, on a straight stretch before the Novara turn, I had her up to a bit over one hundred miles an hour."

"My God, Marcy, are you crazy?" her father asked, horrified. "You might have been killed."

"I'm a pretty fair driver, Dad. I find speed fascinating," Marcy said airily. She turned serious. "Poor Carlo is in a financial bind again. If Costain *Frères* calls his loan he's in bad trouble. The race performance might help."

"Hm-m-m, that's a shame," Tom Tarrant said. "Well, we still have the Saxon-Benz. How did Prince Rupert accept the modifications we asked for?"

"Very well. He wasn't sold on positioning the gas tank until an accident at Milan cost him a car. He's very dependable, and Herr Landstaff, his designer, is a top man."

Dom Renfrow asked, "Marcy, just what is the status of the tie-up with Charles Stewart Rolls?"

"The Rolls-Royce franchise is ours, needing only the completion of the red tape," Marcy said confidently. "And the car Charles and Fred Royce have designed is superb. I'm sure we'll do well with it."

Dom rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Three deluxe lines? Marcy, do you think we can cut that?"

Tom Tarrant answered for her. "It can't be done. We'd be in competition with ourselves. It looks very much to me as if we must drop young Ferroni."

"We don't need to make that decision yet, Dad," Marcy said quickly. "Let's leave it on the table for now and see what happens."

"No harm in that," Tom Tarrant said. "Now, is everyone agreed that we should take on the Rolls-Royce dealership?" The vote was unanimous. "All right. Now Marcy is dickering by mail with this young fellow in Dearborn, Henry Ford. He expects to come out soon with a new car that will sell for less than four hundred dollars. It will be a tremendous moneymaker, if we can get that franchise."

"I don't think the man can do it," Cal Plumb said. "But if he can come anywhere near that figure, why the streets of San Francisco will be overrun with them."

"Keep after it, Marcy," Tom Tarrant said. "We're doing a remarkable business, due to all you people. So let's turn Tarrant's into the top dealer on the Pacific Coast."

In November Marcy had a long letter from Kitti Howerth, Lady Wolverton. With wit and candor Kitti vignetted life in English country society, teas and charity bazaars, garden parties and weddings and deaths, hunt breakfasts and riding to hounds. One item of news startled Marcy:

> You remember Paul Costain, the American who comes to Ashdown for Costain *Frères?* He was in charge of their London office and helped Denis to get the expansion loan for our Luton Works. For some reason you did not seem to like Paul, I know, but you will still be interested to know that he has been transferred to Paris. He will be special assistant to Mme. Demaret, the autocratic woman who holds Costain *Frères* in the palm of her hand, or at least under the ball of her heavy thumb. He has already moved to Paris, no doubt to take over for his cousin Jacques Demaret, who came recently to such a tragic end.

Marcy put down the letter, dismayed. The Ferroni loan matter would surely come up before Paul, and from Jacques's memorandum he would learn that she had spoken favorably for Carlo. In view of that last bitter meeting with Paul at Ashdown, she had no hope that he would show leniency to Carlo. He would enjoy driving the knife in, and then twisting it in the wound. *Oh, Carlo, I've brought this on you,* she thought wearily. *What will happen to you now?*

Her fears were confirmed when a few days later she opened a letter with a French stamp. It was from André Costain:

> Dear Miss Tarrant:
>
> As you asked, I was able to hold up that memo from J. as long as I dared, but when M. Paul Costain came from London to take over, it had to come to his attention. He sent it on to *Maman* immediately. She was cold with anger and as you may suspect, the jig is up for your friend Count Carlo. Our firm is calling his loan, refusing a new one, and will take over his entire operation. The plan is to boot Count Ferroni out into the cold without a *sou.* A damnable thing, in my opinion, but I am too junior to carry any weight in the top circles.
>
> My deep regrets, and to you my most affectionate regards, dear lady.
>
> Your constant admirer,
> André Costain

Sure enough, a form letter arrived the next day from Costain *Frères,* Paris. It announced severance of all ties

between the present management of Ferroni Motors and the French bankers. Sig. Count Carlo Ferroni was no longer connected in any manner with the manufacture of cars at the Novara plant. The letter concluded:

> Cars will continue to be built under the aegis of Costain *Frères.* The company will be known henceforth as "Vinca Motors, Ltd." Our new engineering staff will produce a superior Vinca automobile, and we are sure you will wish to maintain your present profitable connection with our Novara works. We are prepared to conclude quite favorable financial concessions to all existing agencies of the Vinca car.

Sick at heart, Marcy took the letter in to her father. She said, "Dad, the axe has fallen. Poor, poor Carlo."

When he had finished reading it, he looked up, his face pink with anger. "Just like those Costain sons-of-bitches. Damned if I'll deal with them. Marcy, cable them to cancel all shipments except those already on the road. Add that when the Ferroni Vincas we have on hand are sold, we will no longer handle the Vinca car on the West Coast."

Marcy nodded, her lips grim. "The cablegram is already drafted. Dad, I don't know what Carlo is going to do. I'm going to cable him, offering to help him any way we can."

"Suggest that he come to America. A lad of his ability should find a place easily enough," Tom Tarrant said.

"He might, now that his whole Italian operation has been destroyed," she said. "The poor guy was in way over his head, and the calling of his loan will bring down the whole shaky structure, like a row of dominos. The Italian bankers will foreclose on his estates, and every other asset he has. Between them and the Costains they'll strip his bones as bare as a dead rabbit's. And it's mostly my fault, Dad. If I hadn't—" She buried her face in her hands.

He stood up and put his arm about her shoulders. "Now, now, mavourneen, don't think that. You were trying to help, and Carlo knows it. He's a fine and talented man, and he'll light on his feet yet, you wait and see."

She did wait, anxiously, for Carlo's reply to her cable. None came. Instead, three days later the telegraph company forwarded a notation from their Milan office: "Unable locate Count Carlo Ferroni of Novara. Message undelivered."

Marcy sat holding the cablegram, thinking. There had been a considerable time lag between the actual dispossession of Carlo and the arrival of the Costain letter. Carlo might have moved in other directions in the interim. Perhaps he

had gone to England; there he could contact Charles Rolls and Lord Wolverton. Perhaps he had gone to Germany.

She sent a cablegram to the American consul at Milan. The answer came back the next day: "Count Carlo Ferroni obtained American visa six weeks ago. Reason for emigrating —severe financial problems in Italy. Believe Ferroni sailed from Genoa on Italian freighter *Corunna.*"

Joy and relief came over Marcy in a flood. *Then he'll be here soon,* she thought. *Dear Carlo.* She could see him now, walking in the door with his warm smile. She and her father would find him some position to tide him over, until he got his feet on the ground.

To Marcy's disappointment, the holidays passed, the year 1905 slid behind forever, turning into 1906, and still no word from Carlo Ferroni. She instituted some discreet inquiries. Only one brought a definite answer: he had landed in New York from the *Corunna* in November. Then, as far as she could learn, he had vanished into thin air. Two months gone by, and no letter, no telegram, nothing.

Pride, she thought, *that damnable pride of Carlo's. He will not come hat in hand to me, like a beggar. I have to give him grudging admiration for it, even while I'm exasperated with him. You know I love you, Carlo, and your neglect is hurting me. Please write, or wire, or best of all, come to San Francisco. My arms are ready to embrace you, Carlo, and my soul longs for you.*

But there was no word, and as the empty months passed and winter shaded into spring, Marcy's anguish and impatience turned into resignation. She buried herself in work, long hours of work, until at last her father protested, "Are you trying to work yourself into an early grave, mavourneen? You're doing something you need not do. You're neglecting small Tommy."

"Oh, not really, Dad?" she asked contritely. "I can't let that happen. Listen, I've got the Rolls-Royce business nearly sewed up. The final papers will be signed in a few days. Then I'll take it easier, and have more time for Tommy."

"You won't get back to normal until you hear from that young Italian," Tom Tarrant said shrewdly.

CHAPTER IX

In March, 1906, the last shipment of four Vinca cars reached Tarrant Motors. Two of them went immediately to customers on a waiting list. Del Pellegrini, Marcy's aggressive head salesman, sold the black limousine to a wealthy Chinese merchant on Dupont Avenue. Marcy inspected the fourth unit, and found it was a twin to the blue and gold runabout that had almost won the Milan Cinquecento. She rubbed her fingers across the beautifully finished hood.

"I can't let this one go, Dad," she told her father. "I'll take it for my personal car. I don't think I'll have any trouble selling my older runabout."

Tom Tarrant looked admiringly at the sleek car, then at his daughter. "I don't blame you for wanting it, mavourneen. So it's yours." His smile had a certain knowingness in it.

He understood her, she thought. He knew she couldn't part with this last link with Carlo. Then fiercely she thought—*Carlo, damn you for your bullheaded stubbornness! Swallow that pride for once. I want you, I need you, Carlo.*

On the seventeenth of April, she came into her father's office, dressed in a motoring skirt of stylish brevity, a tailored shirtwaist, and a snug jacket of pin-striped broadcloth.

"Daddy, it's such a beautiful day, I'm going to take my old Vinca roadster down to San José. I've found a prospect there whose dream is a Ferroni Vinca, and he won't be able to resist a bargain."

"He'll get one. She's just out of Cal's shop, all worked over," her father said.

"If I don't sell it, I'll drive home tomorrow. If I do, I'll call long-distance and you can have someone meet my train."

"Good enough, I wish I was going along," Tom Tarrant said. "Are you taking Tommy?"

"I'd like to, but he's too much of a handful to mind when I'm closing a sale. I want badly to sell her, too, our last Ferroni in stock. We'll have room for the Rolls-Royces when they start arriving."

"That English auto must be one hell of a car, Marcy.

The word has gotten around, and we already have a waiting list among the high muckamucks of San Francisco. Even at the prices Charlie Rolls is asking for his cars."

"That's great. We got the franchise just in time. Yet I can't get over the feeling we're slapping Carlo in the face by dropping the Vinca."

"It's not Ferroni any more, lass, remember that."

"I will," Marcy said, patting his cheek. "And Dad, try to soothe Tommy's injured feelings. He was very pouty when I told him I wouldn't be home until tomorrow." She picked up gloves and purse.

"I'll calm him down," her father said, walking with her to the door. "And mavourneen, remember you're not driving the Milan Cinquecento today. No speeding, and be careful."

She laughed. "I drive the way Carlo told me to—I drive my car, and the car in front, and the car behind me, as if everyone else behind a wheel is an idiot."

Down the Peninsula toward Palo Alto she drove in brilliant sunshine. The spring air was effervescent, the countryside a lovely green. The Vinca purred contentedly as she tooled it across the swampland around San Bruno. As the road led southerly the traffic thinned, and she had no trouble passing drays and carriages, and an occasional automobile. One Winton tourer challenged the Vinca briefly, but Marcy left it far behind on a straight and empty stretch of road.

Her glance flicked to the empty seat beside her. If only Carlo were with her, she thought, to enjoy the beautiful day, the grand scenery. And tonight they could make love in the hotel in San José. Her mouth twisted at the thought she might never see that beloved man again, nor sleep with him. Yet in the back of her mind she had a certainty that he would again be a part of her life. He must!

Slowing, she wound through the streets of Palo Alto, past Stanford University, and on south through farming country. In San José, she found a room in a pleasant hotel, for her appointment wasn't until the morrow. She strolled through the streets of the bustling city, of course stopping to look into the showrooms of the several auto dealers. They were showing American makes for the most part, and some of them were quite handsome, though the cars lacked the flair and the fine hand workmanship of the top European models. Lacked the high price, too, she thought, smiling to herself.

She enjoyed an excellent seafood dinner in the hotel

dining room, then retired early. She read a while, turned out the light and dropped into dreamless sleep.

She woke suddenly in the gray of dawn, seized by an unknown terror. Someone was shaking her bed violently. She sat up, clutching the coverlet across her breast. Now her bed surged up and down, almost throwing her out. She saw there was no one in the room but herself, and the answer came to her—*earthquake!* Timbers creaked loudly, the pictures on the wall oscillated wildly. Now the chiffonier began to lean slowly toward her and crashed to the floor. From all around through the hotel came thumping and crashing. From the hall she heard shrill screaming and the sound of racing feet.

Minor earthquakes were fairly common in this part of California, but Marcy had never experienced anything like this. She leaped from bed and staggered across the unsteady floor. She found her watch on top of the dresser. It read twelve minutes after five.

The first great tremor subsided. Marcy hurried into her clothes and tossed her belongings into the small valise she had brought, including her purse. The door to her room was jammed, but she managed to wrench it open. Cautiously she peered out. The air of the hall was hazy with dislodged dust, but there was no sign of fire. The floor was covered with fallen plaster. Water hissed and sprayed from a cracked pipe. Now the door across from Marcy flew open, and a girl darted out, uncaring that she was clad only in the scantiest of underwear. She raced toward the stairs.

Clutching her bag, Marcy hurried after the girl. Holding tight to the banister, she ran down three cluttered flights to the hotel lobby. She dodged around a huge, ornate lighting fixture which had crashed to the floor. The room was strewn with overturned chairs and sofas. She crossed to the registration desk with some vague notion of making a telephone call, but she abandoned that when she saw there was no one at the desk. The key and letter rack had fallen and splintered on top of the safe, and the switchboard was ablaze with lights.

Again she heard a rumble like an oncoming train, and she braced herself. The aftershock came rolling along the lobby floor, and there were more thumpings and bangings, and the rattle of plaster. She cried aloud to no one, "I'm getting out of here!" and stumbled out the broken front door to the street. Recalling a little park beyond the hotel, she ran to it. Just behind her there was a stunning crash as a

huge chunk of the hotel's stone cornice tumbled five floors and smashed into the concrete.

She had parked the Vinca last night on the far side of the small square of trees and greenery. Running to the car, she felt a great surge of relief as she saw it was there and intact. In the park the trees swayed, but were standing the tremors without visible damage. Feeling safe here, she got into the car and breathing hard, sat watching the scene of wild confusion.

Others were obeying the human instinct to get out into the open at a time like this. People streamed into the park from all directions. Many of them had been caught by the quake in various stages of undress, so some of the costumes were ludicrous. In spite of her agitation, Marcy had to smile at one pompous gentleman in frock coat and high-collared shirt, his silk cravat neatly tied, his shiny derby hat square on his head—but without trousers over his long underwear.

She sat in the car for a half-hour, a full hour. Another aftershock, though fairly mild, brought hysterical screams from the refugees crowding the park. From where Marcy sat, she could not see much severe damage along this thoroughfare, though she did not doubt many buildings were twisted and racked, and damaged heavily internally.

Not knowing was the hardest thing to bear. Her thoughts raced. How far had the quake extended? How long must one stay here? When could one return home? What had happened in Palo Alto, and Oakland, and the city of San Francisco itself?

More than two hours passed before Marcy learned from a passing policeman that the damage here in San Jose had been moderate when compared with that in much of the Bay area. The harried young man said hoarsely, "It's plain hell, ma'am. We've had some people killed, but up there—" He shook his head. "They say it's a shambles. Many dead, buildings shook down, fires burning everywhere. They say the streets is full of corpses. Most of the telegraph and phone lines is down, so not much news is coming. 'Scuse me, I gotta go, I see the fire engines down the street."

Terror such as she had never known racked Marcy. What of her father, and little Tommy, and all the others? *I've got to get to them!* she thought frantically *I'll drive north until I'm stopped or I run out of road.* With the thought, a measure of calm came over her.

She set the controls of the Vinca and stepped out of the car. She pulled up on the crank, and the big engine started

at the second try. She got in and eased the car out into the cluttered broken street. From behind her she heard cries of "Wait, wait," "Take me, I want to get out!" and "Don't you dare leave without me, you cowardly bitch!"

Marcy, her jaw set, gunned the car, leaving behind the desperate people running after her. Pity tugged at her, but she could take only two or three at most, and there were a hundred, a thousand wanting to get away. Moreover, she was heading for peril, not away from it. So her own overpowering need canceled her humanitarian feelings. A hard choice to make, she thought, but she had do what she had to do.

Two blocks beyond, she braked hard to let a horse-drawn ambulance whirl by, its team straining, its gong clanging. Then she drove on, circling an overturned dray, dodging fallen tile and stonework. At last she reached open country. Here the damage was less noticeable, though once she had to charge through the top branches of a tree which had toppled into the road.

The roadway was wrenched and cracked, the small bridges and culverts awry, but the way was passable. She drove as fast as she dared, finding as she moved north that the policeman's information had been correct. In Palo Alto buildings were collapsed upon themselves. She saw a crowd of men wrenching at fallen timbers to free some trapped soul. She circled a block to avoid a red splash of fire engines trying to put out the leaping flames from a shattered building. Again and again she had to back and fill to find a clear way through the suburbs into open country. Here the road was worse, showing great cracks, and undulating waves.

Far ahead she could see great plumes of smoke billowing into the spring sky. She stopped in the main street of the village of San Bruno, to let the first wave of refugees from the city stream by. Beside the car was a general store which seemed undamaged, but when she looked through the glassless front window, she saw all its merchandise tumbled into an inchoate mass amid the ruins of display cases. A man in a white apron stood like a statue in the middle of that chaos, not lifting a finger, as if he were paralyzed at the extent of his personal disaster.

A curved-dash Oldsmobile, its tonneau piled high with a tangled mass of belongings, pulled up beside Marcy and stopped. There was something vaguely familiar about the stocky driver, and the pale young woman in the seat beside him. Recognition came—James Smollett, a surveyor. He and

his wife had bought this car secondhand from Tarrant Motors about six months ago.

She jumped out and went to the car. She said, "Aren't you Jim Smollett? I'm Marcy Tarrant of Tarrant Motors, remember me? I sold you this car."

They stared at her, eyes glazed with shock. With an effort the man collected his wits, and said in a strained voice, "Yes, of course, Miss Tarrant. It's awful, ain't it? Simply awful. People crushed to death, fires everywhere—I tell you, I thanked God me'n Angela had our li'l Olds. We could hightail it out of that inferno, and we did. It's a terrible, terrible thing, ain't it, Angie?"

"Awful, just agonizing, Miss Tarrant. We saw lots of other people running same as us, heading south. But we was first, wasn't we, Jim?"

"Damn right. I'm a forceful man, Miss Tarrant. I'm used to making quick decisions. Didn't take me long to decide that old Frisco wasn't no place for the Smolletts, no sirree."

"We had a hard time getting out of town," Angela Smollett said. "We'd go and stop, go and stop. People moving in all directions, carrying things. We finally got to the county line and come on here. They got soldiers from the Presidio all over the place, but they ain't stopping people from going out. Just from coming in."

"Yeah, Freddie Funston has got his swaddies guarding things, and Mayor Schmitz, he's give 'em orders to shoot looters on sight. There was this one guy, we heard, going around cutting the fingers off'n dead women to get the rings. Troopers shot him into doll rags, they say."

"But the fire, Jim," Marcy persisted. "What about the fire?"

"Whole town's burning, and no water. Quake busted the water mains, they say. You worried about your house? Where do you live?"

"Franklin, near Washington."

"The Western Addition, eh? Should be all right, though there's some fire west of Van Ness, in Hayes Valley. Probably spread, though." Smollett's manner was subtly triumphant, as though he was thinking, *By God, I'm smart enough to know when to run.*

"Do you think I can make it into the city, Jim?" Marcy asked, feeling desperate but trying to keep her voice calm. "I've got to get home to my family. I have a little boy—"

"Are you crazy, woman?" Smollett cried incredulously. "You're safe here, so don't be a fool, ma'am. And the roads are jammed."

"I appreciate your advice, but I must go," Marcy said firmly. "Do you people have a place to go?"

"Yeah, Angie's got a sister down to Hollister. We'll go down there and sponge off'n them a while. Maybe we'll just never go back."

Marcy got back in her car as the Smolletts roused the storekeeper from his lethargy and got him to fill their gasoline tank from the barrel on its cradle on the store porch. As she put the Vinca into gear to drive north, she was thankful her car's tank was nearly full—doubly glad when she saw in driving through San Mateo County that there weren't any places where she could buy more.

The trickle of refugees was a flood now. Seeing the Bay Shore road jammed, she turned west to El Camino Real, along the ocean. Even here she encountered every kind of vehicle, carts and drays, wheelbarrows, hansom cabs and victorias, even a few motor cars. The southbound press held Marcy's northerly pace to a crawl, for they overflowed the road even in her lane.

Traffic thinned, and she drove past the greensward and blooming flowers of the Daly City cemeteries. She caught herself wondering if any of the mausoleums had split open and given up their dead, as the New Testament story had it, on that Good Friday so many centuries ago. Then she was forced to pull aside as a hansom cab raced toward her at a breakneck pace, and rattled past. She wondered sardonically how huge was the fare being run up by its well-dressed passenger.

Her worry had diminished a bit, with the Smollett's news of the Western Addition being safe so far from the fires that were ravaging the downtown area. Though according to Smollett, the quake here had been much worse than she had felt in San José. The Tarrant home was undoubtedly damaged, and Tommy, poor tyke, must have been terribly frightened. She must get home, she must!

She turned the car down Alemany Boulevard, but soon she came to a barrier, manned by uniformed soldiers carrying rifles. When she remonstrated with the young private who stopped her, he called his officer over. The young lieutenant was quite officious, but his pompousness melted under Marcy's sweetest smile.

"Sorry, miss, nobody can go in, orders of General Funston and Mayor Schmitz. It's dangerous, too, you might get shot for a looter. The fires are out of control and spreading. It's no place for a lady."

"I realize your orders, Lieutenant, but I must get to my family and small son on Franklin Street," she said. Then she had an inspiration. "And I'm one of the owners of Tarrant Motors. I want to turn this car and several others we have over to the authorities for emergency use. I know they are desperate for transport."

"Darned if they ain't, ma'am," the lieutenant said, bemused by Marcy's dazzling smile. He leaned closer. "I shouldn't be telling you this, ma'am, but if you turn west from here, and drive over to Junipero Serra Avenue, you might make it to Golden Gate Park. Lots of refugees flocking there. If any of the military stops you—hey, I'll write you a pass. It ain't legal, but—"

He scribbled a pass on a piece of paper, signed it with a flourish, "Lt. G.C. Badger," and gave it to her. "Good luck, ma'am."

She gave him that smile again and put the Vinca in gear. She said, "You're the finest of gentlemen, Lieutenant Badger. I'll never forget your kindness. If I can make it to the Park, I'm home free. Thank you again."

Driving slowly through the heavy traffic, Marcy made her way to the avenue named for the famous mission priest, and turned north. She overtook a teen-age girl and a younger boy trudging bravely north, and saw that their faces were sooty and tear-stained. She stopped the car and beckoned them to get in. They climbed in eagerly, and she guessed it was the first time they had ever ridden in an automobile.

"I'm Ruby Fortune, and this is my brother Mike," the girl told her. "We was burned out this morning in the fire south of Market. Mom told us to get away, while she went to help our grandpa, who was sick. We started walking toward South San Francisco, but the soldiers turned us back and told us to go to Golden Gate Park to wait for our mom. It was good of you to pick us up, ma'am. We're sure tired."

"And hungry, too," the boy said. "Ruby, you think Mom and Grandpa will be all right?"

"I sure hope so," the girl said, a catch in her voice. Softly, so the boy couldn't hear, she said, "That whole street where Grandpa lives is afire. I'm scairt, ma'am, scairt bad."

At the only roadblock Marcy encountered, the soldiers saw the sooty-faced children, and waved the car through. She stopped the car at the south entrance of the great park. She took a business card from her purse and wrote her street address on the back.

Giving the card to the girl, she said, "Ruby, if you and

Mike don't locate your mother by tomorrow morning, come to this address, and we'll make a place for you to stay. Now I've got to go on. You find the people in charge of the refugee situation and report in. They'll find you something to eat, I think."

The two thanked Marcy profusely as they got out, and were still waving as Marcy drove away.

She drove carefully through streets crowded with people fleeing the fire, many of them laden with the most outlandish belongings, bird cages, pictures, plaster casts. They moved like zombies, as if unable to grasp the enormity of their loss, of this horror which was enveloping their city. Marcy was near to tears as she drove down Washington, turned, and stopped the Vinca in front of her house on Franklin.

To her relief, the house didn't seem to be badly damaged. The front steps were twisted aslant, one of the gingerbread towers over the third floor was askew, but the chimneys looked intact. The archway over the driveway to the old carriage house was upended as if by a giant hand.

Weary, drained of emotion, trembling with reaction and fatigue, Marcy opened the front door. A small tornado swept down the front hall and dove into her arms so hard it nearly knocked her down. "Mommy! Mommy! You're home!" Tommy cried. "I missed you, Mommy. The house nearly fallded down, and I cried."

"Cry no more, darling, Mommy's home," Marcy said, and as she clasped the child to her bosom she felt a great surge of joy.

CHAPTER X

"Ain't it awful, mum?" Lulu Leghorn asked Marcy as she took the child from Marcy's arms. Her face was taut with fear, and Mary Tupper, standing behind Lulu, was deathly pale and drawn. "The earthquake was bad enough, us thinkin' the house was about to tumble down on our heads. But it was soon over. It's this fire that scares us now. They say the whole city is burning up. You can see the great flames and smoke clouds from our front window. It won't get here, will it, mum?"

"I don't know," Marcy said honestly. "Has Logan turned the gas off? Good. You girls will have to do your cooking out of doors for a few days. Don't start any fires inside." She reached out and patted the child's dark head. "Now that Mommy's home, you take your nap, Tommy."

The boy kissed her, smiled, and went willingly with Lulu up to the nursery. Marcy said to Mary, "Where's Dad?"

"At the gayrage. They're moving the cars out, in case the fires gets there. Oh, Miss Marcy, this is a turrible thing. No water to fight the fires, they're blowing up the whole city with dynamite. Hear them booms?"

"Don't worry about it," Marcy said, patting the trembling woman on the shoulder. "Where's Logan?"

"The old fool is up on the roof with some barrels of water from our cistern, and a bucket and a mop. He's ready, he says, for hot coals or hellfire. He watches the fire downtown through that spyglass of his, like some old sea captain lookin' for whales."

"Good for Logan," Marcy said, managing a laugh. That indomitable old coachman had the right idea. She donned her jacket again. "I'm going down to the shop, Mary. You girls keep a close watch on Tommy, now. He's adventurous, you know."

"We will, mum. We'll send the new blocks for you if we need you," Mary said.

She walked swiftly down the hill the short distance to Tarrant Motors. The smoke was heavy enough to make her cough and hold her handkerchief over her face. She walked

into the big drive-in door. There was her father, Cal Plumb, and Dom Renfrow supervising the evacuation. Her father's face lighted up when he saw her, and he limped quickly toward her.

"Thank God you're safe, mavourneen!" he cried, wrapping her in a bear hug. "Did you have a bad time?"

"Bad enough, Daddy," she said. "Much damage in San José and Palo Alto, but nothing like it is here. But I made it all right by the back roads. What can I do to help?"

"We're moving all our new cars out, just in case. The sexton in charge of Laurel Hills Cemetery is a good friend of mine, I got his permission to use that undeveloped section inside the wall for storage. We'll cover the cars with those big tarpaulins from the loft. Some of the boys have volunteered to stand guard. We hear looting is already bad."

"When I see the poor people with their pitiful burdens, it makes me sick to think of what they must have left behind," Marcy said. "You think the Army might requisition our cars?"

"I don't doubt the Little General will do just that, when he gets around to it. Cal is pulling the plugs and the distributor rotors on the new cars, so nobody's gonna get 'em running."

"Good. The way the streets are, they would beat our new cars into junk in a few hours. We must help, though. Dom, how many used cars do we have on hand?"

"Eight, I think, not counting the LaFrance truck or your Ferroni," Renfrow said.

"Dad, let's beat the general and the mayor to the punch. Let's send word to them that we have eight vehicles in operating condition that can be used as long as they are needed."

"Marcy, you have the touch of genius," Tom Tarrant said. "No doubt they'll ruin the cars, but that isn't as bad as busting hell out of our new models. Still, it's going to cost us a mort of money."

"Others are losing everything," Marcy pointed out. "It's our bounden duty. But I won't give up my Ferroni. It's just a runabout anyhow. Cal, take it up to the cemetery when you make another trip. Bring back that Oldsmobile touring car, you know the one. The Ferroni is parked in front of our house."

The foreman grinned. "Del Pellegrini will be happy. He's been trying to unload that crate for two months. You're right, Marcy, it will be better for hauling than the Ferroni."

As Cal Plumb left in the Saxon-Benz, the last of the new cars, Tom Tarrant told one of the mechanics to go with him to drive the Vinca. When they were gone, Marcy and her father and Dom Renfrow went to the big front windows to look east toward the burning city.

The day was dark early. Through the plate glass Marcy could see the rolling clouds of smoke and the flaming torches of business buildings as they were gutted by fire. A wave of fear swept over her. She wanted to turn and run, run anywhere, and never stop. She clenched her teeth and told herself sternly, *Don't panic, Marcy. It's no time for cowardice. It's not easy to be brave, though, with the slam of those distant explosions as buildings are dynamited. I can feel it right under my heart.*

She turned to her father to say something, and at that moment another quake rocked the building. She clutched at Tom Tarrant and Dom for support, and the three held each other tight for the few seconds the aftershock lasted, one of the seventeen that rocked San Francisco that day. On the broad sweep of Van Ness Avenue below them, people scurried about in panic like ants in a disturbed ant hill. Some dropped the precious items they may have carried for miles, only to abandon them now. Drivers whipped their teams, fleeing to nowhere. And in the midst of it, a big touring car, with the red flag of an explosive warning, went plowing through the refugees, motor roaring, horn blowing. As it passed, one front tire was in ribbons and the car was running on the rim.

When the building stopped shimmying and Marcy could draw a deep breath, she asked Dom Renfrow, "Dom, how's Rita?"

"She has snapped out of it at last, after losing our baby," he said. "Dr. Beale had a long talk with her, and got her to stop blaming herself for the stillbirth. And she's gone back to full-time nursing, which is the best therapy she could have."

"But where is she now?"

"At work at St. Vincent's," he said.

"But Dom! That's squarely in the path of the fires in the Mission District," Marcy cried.

"Not really," Dom said. "The old hospital is gone, gutted, just like the Mechanic's Pavilion and City Hall. The doctors and nurses managed to evacuate all the patients and they've set up temporarily in the Women's College buildings, well out of the fire zone, we hope. Rita paid a young boy

twenty dollars to tell me she was all right, but the place is jammed with burn cases, dynamite injuries, broken bones, and hysteria." He waved a hand toward the towering smoke. "With that going, I don't know when I'll see my wife again."

"Oh, I'm so glad she's safe," Marcy said. "She's had a bad time. And you too, Dom. Dad, are you going to strip this building?"

Tom Tarrant shook his head. "I thought we'd wait to see which way our fiery frog jumps. We've got everything ready to load, tools, parts, files, office equipment. We can get it out in a hurry if need be."

They watched a while longer as the early darkness fell. The people still milled in the streets, instead of moving on to Golden Gate Park, where they would have some measure of safety, and makeshift relief centers were being manned. Since all telephone service was out, communication was almost nonexistent. Those people were numbed by tragedy, Marcy thought, and shoved from pillar to post by wild rumors of every kind. Strangely, she was becoming almost numb to their suffering; maybe, she thought, the human spirit could accept only so much before it rebelled.

She turned to her father. "Daddy, I'm weary to the bone, and to the depths of my soul. Let's go home."

"A good idea, mavourneen. I've been standing so long my game leg is giving me fits. Better come along Dom, stay at our house tonight. Your little house in Sunset is too far out, the way the streets are."

Renfrow shook his head. "No, Cal and I are going to bed down here, keep an eye on the place. And I've got to get word to the Committee of Fifty about our eight cars. They're not far, at the North End police station over on Washington. Their headquarters are set up there, or were at one o'clock. God only knows where they are now."

"Who is on the committee?" Marcy asked.

"Gene Schmitz, the mayor, all the big bugs, Phelan, Spreckels, men of ability and status. None of the Board of Supervisors, thank God."

"Amen to that," Tom Tarrant said. "There's only one man of the eighteen that's honest, the rest are as crooked as boar's piss on snow. 'Tis said you couldn't get them to pass the Lord's Prayer if they weren't paid."

"The supervisors and Abe Rust are damned weak reeds to lean on in a case like this," Dom Renfrow said. "So I guess we'll have to rely on Mayor Schmitz, General Funston, and Jesus Christ."

"What a hand to draw to," Marcy murmured.

It was almost impossible for Marcy to sleep, exhausted as she was. Once Tommy's frightened whimpering wakened her, and she hurried to the nursery to hold and soothe him.

The Tarrant household rose early on the nineteenth. Their ablutions were necessarily sketchy, and breakfast, though adequate, was makeshift, with the coffee made on an improvised campfire on the driveway. Logan Cresap muttered curses at the "damned fools who are blowing our city to hell." The booms were louder now, and more frequent, and Marcy was in agreement, though she supposed the destruction was necessary, with the extreme shortage of water.

She kissed small Tommy goodbye, noting with concern that the child was pale, and flinched at the recurring sound of explosions. *How much can a little fellow stand?* she wondered. She told Mary and Lulu to carry on, and to open the windows of the house so the glass would not be shattered by the dynamite shock waves. Then unhappy, worried, she and her father walked down to the garage.

Marcy knew she must play an active role this day, so she had put on the cavalry breeches and puttees, the boy's shirt and suede jacket she had worn for the Milan Cinquecento, with Carlo. Looking out from the third floor of the Tarrant Building, she was glad for once that Carlo wasn't here. Wherever he might be, he was safer than in this holocaust.

Dom Renfrow, and Cal Plumb, red of eye and stubbled with unshaven whiskers, were sending out the seven cars needed by the Committee of Fifty. Between times, they ate the sandwiches Marcy had brought, and made sure the requisitions signed by each city driver were in order. With the help of Beulah Danaher, the secretary of Tarrant's, they had fashioned improvised flags to be mounted on each vehicle. The legend in red letters on a white background read "Emergency Service."

The eighth vehicle was the new Oldsmobile touring car, and Marcy had assigned herself as driver. There would be plenty for her to do, she was sure. At the moment she tried to outline the extent of the fire lines. She was shocked to see that the fire had climbed Nob Hill and was sweeping toward the east side of Van Ness Avenue. The Barbary Coast was gone, Chinatown was a welter of flame, the Fairmont Hotel and the great mansions on top of Nob Hill were gutted ruins. The sky was a gray pall of smoke, and though there was no strong wind, the fire was creating its own gale. Some called it a "fire storm."

Now up and down Sacramento and California, familiar buildings were going up in flame. As she watched, an apartment building two blocks east of Polk became a gaunt torch against the murky sky. The last of the area residents were leaving now, running up the streets toward Van Ness. The dynamite blasts were closer now.

Cal Plumb came up the stairs. "Marcy, there's a young woman nearby with a sick baby and an injured husband. Can you get them help?"

"Of course," Marcy said. "My car's ready? Then I'll load them up."

The young woman, dirty, disheveled, had her child wrapped in a blanket. "It's the smoke," she explained. "And will you help Gavin get in? I think his leg's broke."

The young man was limping along with a crutch made from a broken tree branch. Marcy and Cal got the three into the Olds, and she started up the hill, past the crowded hummocks of LaFayette Park. The only working hospital she knew of was the relocated St. Vincent's, so she took them to the Women's College buildings. Nurses and orderlies, staggering from weariness, took the three in hand and they disappeared into a dormitory.

Marcy was just putting the car in gear when two men came running out. They were dressed in once-white uniforms, now stained with blood and grime and soot. They were waving to Marcy. She stopped and waited.

"Young man, are you free—oh, pardon me, miss," the older man said. "Thought you were a boy until I saw that mop of red hair."

"Think nothing of it," Marcy said. "Where do you want to go?"

"You're a godsend, miss. We just got word they've got a bunch of burn victims in a tent at the Park who can't be moved. Can you take us there? We're doctors."

"Hop in," Marcy said.

The two men tossed their laden grips into the tonneau and climbed into the front seat. As she put the big car in gear and started down the rough, nearly empty street, she said, "You men look weary."

"Thirty hours straight," the older man said. "Without a wink of sleep."

"I managed twenty minutes this morning," the younger man said. Then he frowned. "I wish to God I had an idea of where my wife is."

Marcy dropped them off in the park center and they hur-

ried away. She drove carefully, avoiding the refugees who were everywhere. Why, she thought, there weren't just hundreds, there were thousands, tens of thousands. So overwhelming was the sight, she drove as fast as she could to get out of the Park.

Back at the Tarrant garage, Marcy parked the Olds and got out.

She found her father and Dom Renfrow on the empty third floor, watching the fire. She took a sandwich from the basket which someone, probably Mary Tupper, had brought, and munched it, hardly knowing what kind it was. She reported on her errands, and learned that there were no new emergencies at the moment. "Except yon fire," Tom Tarrant said. "It's getting damned close."

Looking from the front window, Marcy was amazed at the progress the fire had made since morning. It was devouring buildings east of Polk as a forest fire devours a stand of fir trees. The streets were empty now. Then she saw a man come shooting out of the door of a burning apartment building, his clothing afire. He ran down the center of the empty street like a human torch, and though it was too far to hear him, Marcy knew the man was screaming. She watched him crumple, roll, then lie as still as a bundle of charred rags.

Marcy, sickened, turned away, only to see a woman running west across Van Ness, herding a motley group of children, perhaps ten in all. She hurried down the stairs and intercepted them. "Where are you going?" she asked.

Panting, the woman said, "To the Park. It seems like the only safe place. All these children, my own, my neighbors', and a couple of strays—could you take them all? I'll walk, if need be."

"No need," Marcy said. "Pile them in and we'll be on our way."

She had never seen a group of children that age so stunned, so quiet, as these were. She wished she could feed them, and comfort them, and find them a place to sleep, but she could not. *It's the children*, she thought, *who bear the brunt of a disaster like this.* Adults could cope, somehow, but the kids were overwhelmed and lost.

She delivered her load at the Park entrance, and the woman thanked Marcy with tears in her eyes. Then she hurried to catch up to her scurrying charges, who seemed revitalized by the soft green of grass and shrubbery.

It was mid-afternoon when Marcy got back to the garage,

to find Cal Plumb gone with the LaFrance truck. Her father, gray-faced with pain and weariness, told her, "We've got to get out, Marce. The fire has jumped Van Ness to the south of us, and they're dynamiting everything on the east side of Franklin, from Clay to Sutter. The side streets, too. Seven whole blocks."

"You're moving our tools and parts out? Dad, I'm going to take Tommy and the girls away. Let the house burn if need be." There was desperation tugging at her, desperation of mind and heart.

Her father shook his head. "Not yet, mavourneen. They think they can hold at Franklin if they take the east side down. And at Clay they can anchor on that great stone fortress of Claus Spreckels. Nothing could burn that ugly mausoleum."

Marcy hesitated. Then she nodded. "Tommy will be less frightened in his own house, with the girls. And I doubt if old Logan would leave his sentry post. All right, Daddy. I'll take a load of files in my car. I think I can take the rest in one more trip. Now you leave on the run if it gets bad."

"With my game leg, it will be a walk, mavourneen," he said.

She took the Oldsmobile touring car through back streets to Laurel Hill Cemetery, and turned in at the stone gate. At the west end, beyond the monuments and mausoleums of the developed part, she found the tarpaulin-covered mounds that marked the stock and assets of Tarrant Motors. Bill Faber and Jake Greenspan, her two employees, put down their shotguns and helped her store the files under the canvas.

When the car was emptied and Marcy had gotten behind the wheel again she said, "I'll be back with one more load, boys. The garage may go any time. Have you had any trouble?"

Jake Greenspan shook his head, as if puzzled. "Can't understand it, Miss Marcy. Hardly anybody is camping out here. Something about a cemetery gives them the willies, I suppose. But we'll keep an eye peeled."

"Do that. And if any officials try to commandeer our cars, just tell them the cars are new and won't run. Refer them to the garage. Anything you need?"

Bill Faber gave her a wry smile. "Well, if you can manage it, something to eat and a couple warm coats. We ain't et since early this morning."

"Oh, God forgive me for neglecting you, boys," Marcy

said contritely. "I'll bring you something when I come back. Do you need water?"

"No, that's a funny thing, Miss Marcy," Faber said. "The boys from the water company, Herman Schussler's crew, worked all night, and they've got some of the mains flowing. We're all right there. We got buckets full ready to douse any sparks that fall on our coverings."

At four o'clock Marcy loaded the last of the files and books into the touring car. The fire was a sheer wall of flame east of Van Ness now, and the booming of explosions was constant, some of them so close Marcy could feel the shock of concussion against her body.

"Fireman told us they're getting ready to blow the houses on Clay between Franklin and Van Ness," her father told her. "Pray God that stops it from moving north. I think we're going to be all right yet."

"I hope so," Marcy said. "I'll drop this stuff off at the cemetery and come back here, to take you and the girls and Tommy away if need be."

Ash and cinders were smudging the interior of the open car as she parked it in front of the Tarrant house. She ran in, giving the girls instructions to prepare food for the guards; then she lifted Tommy and kissed him, feeling his heart pounding like a small trip-hammer.

"Mommy, I don't like this," he said in a voice edging on hysteria.

"Now, now, baby, it will be all right. Do you want to go with Mommy?"

He looked out into the red inferno beyond. He shook his head, and buried his face in her breast. "No, I'm afraid. I want to stay with Mary and Lulu. You come back, Mommy."

"I'll do that, son, just as quick as I can. You be a good boy, now." There were tears in her own eyes as she put him down.

She drove past LaFayette Park, its steep slopes crowded with people. Along the more prosperous streets, she could see phaetons, victorias and surreys standing at the curb, their horses in harness shifting restlessly. The liveried drivers nodded in the seat, or paced beside the vehicles, looking nervously toward the east. Marcy knew the readied vehicles would take their elite owners to the country if the flames broached Van Ness again. *Strange,* she thought, *how people hang onto their homes in the face of deadly peril. I guess I'm no better. Dad and I should have vacated the Franklin Street house hours ago.*

She drove through littered streets to Laurel Hill, where the men helped her unload the records, and store them in the tonneau of a Saxon-Benz landaulet safe under the canvas. Faber and Greenspan were delighted when she gave them the large basket of food she had had Mary and Lulu prepare.

"Sorry there's no coffee, boys," Marcy said. "We're not allowed to use the stoves. But you'll find a bottle of Chianti in the basket if you need something to wash down your lunch."

"You're the best boss ever, Miss Marcy," Greenspan said, grinning. "Say, on your way out of here, watch for a young couple with three small children. They're all confused and they don't talk English. Maybe you can give them a hand."

Marcy said, "Thanks boys. I'll watch for them."

She saw the little family standing near the stone gate of the cemetery and stopped the car. She beckoned them to come over. Before she could ask a question, the man burst into a torrent of German. "My wife sick is, milk the baby needs. Where is somewhere we can go to get shelter and food?"

Marcy answered in German. The faces of the man and the blonde young woman lighted as if the sun had come from behind a cloud. "You won't find help here," Marcy said. "You should go to Golden Gate Park, where the relief efforts are centered."

"Yah, we try to go there, but we do not know the way, and when we ask, no one understands us," the man said.

"All right, pile in, all of you, and I'll take you there," Marcy said, and held open the door of the touring car.

Eagerly, the family got in, and as Marcy started the car, the man poured out the tale of woe which had become so familiar to her in the past two days, except that the Schultzes had only been in America a month, and did not yet know the language. They had been brought over as gardener and maid at the mansion of a wealthy San Francisco brewer.

"All gone now," Schultz said sadly. "And Herr Kolb in Germany, visiting. How terrible he will feel when he finds his fine house burned to the ground."

"There was nothing you could have done," Marcy said. She stopped at the north gate of the Park. "Here we are. But just a minute." Quickly she wrote a note in English, defining the needs of the little family. She handed it to Schultz.

"Give this to one of the officials, and he will know what to do," she said.

The Schultzes got out with profound expressions of gratitude. With a wave of the hand, Marcy put the car in gear and was about to pull away. At that moment a man came running, his hand held up for her to stop. She braked and looked at him inquiringly as he came panting up to the side of the car.

CHAPTER XI

The man was tall, with long hair that gave him a faintly theatrical appearance. His olive-skinned face was gray with fatigue. His words, in such broken English she could not make out his meaning, tumbled over each other in his desperate need to be understood. As Marcy looked at him uncomprehending, he thrust out his hands, palm up, in appeal. "*Dio mio*, signorina, if only you could understand me," he cried in Italian.

When she answered rather haltingly in the same tongue, his face lighted up just as had the face of Schultz. "What exactly can I do for you?" she asked.

"My name is Martino. I am the valet for the supreme, the great one, Enrico Caruso. He is a weary man, a hungry man. He must get to safety. That voice so magnificent, it must be saved for posterity. Will you take him? We will pay."

Marcy knew that Caruso, the world's most popular tenor, had sung Don José in *Carmen* on the night before the earthquake. But she had supposed such an important figure would long since have been escorted to safety. She was startled to learn the singer was instead among the hundred thousand refugees in this great park.

"Where do you want to go?" Marcy asked.

"To the ferries, to the boats. We must get out of this antechamber of hell," Martino said.

"I'll try to get you there, if it is possible," Marcy said. "Bring him here to the car."

Martino darted away, and in a minute or two came back with a tall, handsome man of evident Italian descent, and a pudgy, grimy, smoke-stained man, rather short of stature, his face blank with shock.

"Get in, Sig. Caruso," Marcy said to the tall man. "And your friends as well. I'll try to get you to the ferries."

The tall man smiled wanly. "No, signorina, I am Antonio Scotti. *This* is Enrico Caruso." He flicked a thumb toward the pudgy man.

She held the door of the car open. Martino and Scotti

stood aside while the short man clambered in, clutching a framed picture to his chest. He dropped into the seat as if he was utterly weary. The other two got in beside him. Marcy slammed the door shut.

But instead of starting the Oldsmobile, Marcy sat quiet. Doubt was beginning to tug at her. How did she know these men were not impostors? This short man in the ragged clothes looked little like the romantic figure the great Caruso must be. The thought made her angry.

"Before I take you anywhere, I must have proof that you are indeed the men you say you are," she said in Italian.

"You think we can't pay?" the man Martino asked stiffly. Reaching into a jacket pocket, he took out a leather billfold. He reached it toward her, and with a thumb riffled the thick sheaf of bills it contained. "There, you see? How much do you want? Say it, we pay whatever it is."

"I don't want any money," Marcy insisted. "But I have important matters of my own to care for. I don't intend to be taken in by three impostors."

The one who called himself Scotti said gently, "Signorina, this is indeed Sig. Caruso."

"If he is, then let him prove it," she snapped.

Her words seemed to shake the pudgy man out of his lethargy. He drew himself up from his slump, looking taller, more personable. He said in a voice that was almost a croak, "But signorina, the voice—it is gone. All this smoke. Caruso is ruined by this hellhole."

Marcy was convinced now that she was being put upon. She said, "A poor excuse. Get out, all of you. I have more important things to do than cart impostors around."

The short man looked at her, eyes snapping with anger. "You force me, signorina," he said. "Perhaps you ruin the incomparable voice forever. But since you insist, I will prove it to you."

He stood up in the back seat of the car. With his right hand thrust into the bosom of his coat, Napoleon style, he braced himself against the front seat. He hawked and spat, cleared his throat noisily, then he opened his mouth and very softly began to sing. As the notes came fine and true, a look of surprise came over his face, as if he found it hard to believe his voice was still there. He sang a few bars in a tentative manner, then gaining confidence, with increasing volume, he launched into that grand tenor aria from *Carmen: "The Flower Song"* from Act II—Don José's brilliant song.

Heads turned among the bystanders as that glorious tenor

voice rang out. Then as if realizing the damage he might be doing, the singer stopped abruptly. To Marcy he said jubilantly "So, signorina—do you still doubt I am the great Caruso?"

Marcy smiled and put the car in gear. "I am convinced, signor. You are indeed the great, the marvelous Enrico Caruso. I'll try to get you to the Oakland Ferry."

As she drove east through the cracked streets, she could hear her passengers talking back and forth in rapid Italian. Some of it was too quick for her to comprehend, but she did gather an outline of adventure, of moving from the threatened Palace Hotel to the St. Francis, of leaving there ahead of the flames, and wandering about Nob Hill, until it too was threatened. A hired wagon had taken Caruso to the Park, where his valet Martino and Antonio Scotti had searched for him. After an anxious night they had finally found each other, a feat almost miraculous considering the great crowds assembled there. As she turned down Washington Street toward Van Ness, she could hear the singer muttering in English, "one 'ell of a place! One 'ell of a place. You bet I never come back."

"What is the picture, signor?" Marcy asked over her shoulder.

He leaned forward, holding it where she could see. "My great and noble friend, Theodore Roosevelt," he said proudly. "See, he has autographed it to his friend Enrico. It is my passport, signorina. It will take me through all lines, all barriers. Ah, my friend Teddy, I thank you, I thank you." He drew it back and kissed it extravagantly, then clutched it against his chest again, as if he feared someone might take it.

Marcy turned south on Franklin, finding the Tarrant home was still intact, though a short distance beyond, on the east side of Franklin, only the great stone castle of Claus Spreckels stood impregnable against the sweep of flame and the roil of smoke.

Satisfied, Marcy turned the car toward the Tarrant Building, for a quick check before trying her luck down Van Ness, to circle around past Fort Mason and reach the ferries by way of East Street. She was just opposite the door at the side of Tarrant Motors when there was a bang and a hiss from beneath the car.

"Damn!" she said disgustedly, and braked to a stop. She turned toward her passengers. "Sorry, gentlemen, but you'll

have to wait a bit until I get this blowout repaired. It will take perhaps twenty minutes. Then I'll take you on down."

"A thousand thanks, signorina, for what you have done," Antonio Scotti said. "We will—"

"We cannot wait," Caruso cried. "Thank you, signorina, but we must find other transportation. Come, Martino, let us go out on the avenue. Find a wagon, a cab, anything. Goodbye, signorina." Reaching, he grasped Marcy's hand, and, lifting it, implanted a loud kiss upon it. Then the three of them were out of the Oldsmobile and hurrying to Van Ness. She looked after them for a moment, then got out and crossed the street to the garage.

She found Cal Plumb and one of his men talking to Tom Tarrant. Dom Renfrow was sitting on one of the few chairs left, his chin on his chest. He looks utterly exhausted, Marcy thought. And Dad isn't much better.

"Cal, where's the LaFrance?" she asked.

"Out on Gough, busted down," the foreman said. "We came back on foot. Hey, I'm glad you brought the Olds. We might need it to get out of here in a hurry."

"I had a blowout just as I got here," Marcy said. "Have you got a spare shoe, Cal?"

"Yep, and we'll have it on in two shakes of a lamb's tail. Come along, Freddy," the foreman said to his helper.

"What's the matter, Daddy?" Marcy asked, seeing the grimness of his face.

"The firemen think they've blocked the fire from traveling west," he said. "They've taken out the seven blocks on the east side of Franklin and are holding. Now they're afraid it will jump Van Ness somewhere else. So the mayor has given orders to blow everything on the east side, over there. Mansions, palaces, apartment houses, they're all going. I hope it's enough to stop it."

"Hadn't we better get out?" she asked anxiously.

He looked out into the hellfire across the avenue, where the street dipped down to Polk. As they watched, a tall wooden building blew up with a tremendous crash. Timbers and siding, doors and window frames went sky high. In their own building glass tinkled as a window went out from the concussion.

"They got a whole steamer load on the *General Slocum* from the dynamite plant at Pinole," Tom Tarrant said. "Del Pellegrini has been hauling it for them from the docks. Looks like the damned fools are trying to use the whole cargo of

dynamite in one shot. Somebody's going to blow himself to hell, I'll bet a hat."

"It doesn't look good. I'm worried about Tommy," Marcy said.

"We'd better pull stakes," Tom Tarrant said with a sigh. "I hate to lose all we've built up here, but I guess we're no better than many others. Marcy, you call the two boys down from the roof. I'll go out and see how Cal is coming with the car. We'll wake up Dom and load everyone into the Olds, swing by the house and get the girls and Tommy. Then we'll head for the hills, or the ocean, or someplace where it's cool and green and there are no fires of hell."

Marcy hurried to the stairs and ran up. She climbed the ladder to the roof hatch and stepped onto the roof. The heat of the nearby fire caught her with suffocating strength, and the roar of the fire to the east was a steady growl. She saw two dim figures in the smoke and ran to them.

"Boys, come on down," she cried. "Dad says to give it up."

"But Miss Marcy, this roof may catch from sparks," one of the men protested.

"Let it catch," Marcy said, taking them by the arm. "It's too dangerous. We'll let the tail go with the hide. Come on." At her words they moved reluctantly to the trapdoor.

They clattered down ladder and stairs. Reaching the ground floor, the two men went on out to the street. Marcy stopped to shake Dom Renfrow awake. "If you can sleep through that blasting, you can sleep through anything, Dom," she said. He shook his head, rubbing his temples, trying to clear his thoughts. "Come along, we're evacuating the place," she said.

As they reached the big side door of the garage, Marcy was horrified to see Mary Tupper and Lulu Leghorn, with small Tommy, talking to Tom Tarrant beside the car on which Cal Plumb and his helper were working.

Mary ran across the street toward Marcy. She said in a hysterical voice, "We couldn't stand it no longer, mum. The dynamite blasts frightened Tommy, and he was cryin' for his gramps and his mommy. We thought it would be as safe here—"

"It isn't," Marcy said sharply. Then seeing the maid's face break with contrition, she said, "There, there, Mary, don't cry. It's all right. We were going to pick you up in a few minutes anyhow. Where's Logan?"

"The old fool wouldn't come. He's going to save that house if it's the last thing he ever does, he says."

"It might just be," Marcy said grimly. She patted Mary on the shoulder, and with the maid and Dom Renfrow following, started across the street.

At that moment another dynamite blast went off across Van Ness, so close and so heavy that Marcy could feel the jolt of it in the pit of her stomach. Involuntarily she cringed, putting her head down, feeling panic tugging at her.

Then she looked up and screamed. With the startling quickness of a four-year-old, wild with fright, the little boy darted away from his grandfather and Lulu, running madly down the street toward the broad avenue. Lulu leaped for him, but her foot struck a chunk of broken stone and she went down, falling heavily. Tom Tarrant yelled, and took after the boy with a limping run. Marcy, her fright putting wings on her feet, raced across the street and down the cluttered sidewalk. She was still twenty yards away when Tommy turned the corner in his wild race to nowhere. She realized that the only thought in the child's mind was to get away from terror, somehow, to leave it behind him.

She spun around the corner, and her father, in his desperate need, and in spite of his stiff leg, gained on the little fellow. At that moment the apartment house across the avenue went up in a monumental blast of dynamite. The concussion of it thrust Marcy against the front of a building. It took her breath away. The building walls across from her blew outward, bricks sprayed like a fountain into the air. Stunned, Marcy saw a great balk of timber sail upward, a floor beam, perhaps, or a monstrous sill. It rose higher and higher, turning lazily end for end, taking its infinite, horrifying time as it arched out over the broad avenue.

Marcy gasped and screamed again. As her father leaped for the boy, his leg, injured so long ago, gave way under him. He fell, gathering Tommy in, and lay on the sidewalk, protecting the boy with his own body. Marcy saw the great timber strike the sidewalk, and like a battering ram, bounce and smash Tough Tom Tarrant and his grandson Tommy against the stone wall of the building, before it tumbled to a stop a few yards away.

Marcy raced to them and went down on her knees. She reached for the broken body of her child. His grandfather's protecting body had kept the child from being battered. His eyes were closed, and he looked as if he were sleeping. Yet as she clutched him she saw the dark head wobble bone-

lessly, the life gone from him. She laid him down again, and threw herself across the two bodies, not knowing she was screaming without end, not caring that her clothes were soaked with blood. She put her arms around them, not able to accept the sudden finality of death.

There was a clatter of feet, and someone raised her up. She heard Dom Renfrow say, "Oh, my God!" Then the earth spun, and blessed darkness swirled around her and she was gone.

It was morning in the house on Franklin Street. Marcy pushed away the toast Mary had prepared over the campfire outside, and drank a cup of hot black coffee, and another. The numbness of the long night was leaving her, though it had been a long time after she had been revived and put to bed before she could grasp the utter finality of her loss. She found herself praying in the dark, shaking to the recurring distant booms of dynamite explosions. *Go ahead, go ahead,* she thought angrily, *you've killed my father and my child, so I don't care what you do.* Then remorse seized her. She knew the men were only doing what they had to do, and they were brave men. *I can't condemn them,* she thought.

Earlier, she had risen at dawn, and washed carefully in a bare minimum of stored water. She dressed in the boy's clothing she had often used when she rode in Marin County. Lulu had taken the other clothes, sodden with blood, away when she had helped Marcy to bed.

She looked out at the city, and the flames were much less, though smoke still rolled and seeped from stark ruins. The day was not as dark as it had been the morning before. Quietly, so she would not waken others, she entered her father's bedroom, and stood for a moment looking down at the sheeted forms on the bed, one large, the other small.

At last she reached out, drawing the sheet back from the faces. They both looked strangely peaceful, with no hint of the horror and the violence of the evening before. She stooped and kissed the cold flesh of each face. She whispered, "God shower his blessings on you, my dear ones. Today you must be together in paradise. Take care of the darling, Daddy. Don't let him ever be lost or lonesome. And you, Tommy, be a—be a good boy always, and mind your grandpa, and—and remember your mommy loves you forever."

A silent sob racked her as she drew the sheet back over

the faces. She choked it back and whispered, "Goodbye, my darlings." She hurried from the room, head bent, trying to keep from breaking down. With slow steps she went down the broad stairs, a hand on the banister to steady her.

Lulu and Mary were in the kitchen, red-eyed and ashen. "Did you—see them, mum?" Lulu asked, her voice broken.

Marcy nodded. "They looked so peaceful. Thank you, girls, for laying them out so beautifully. No one could have done it better."

"We learned it in the old country, mum," Lulu said. Her hand went to the great blue welt on her forehead. "Oh, Miss Marcy, if I only hadn't—" she wailed.

"Stop that, Lulu!" Marcy said sharply. "We must not torture ourselves with what might have been. We must accept that it was ordained that they should leave us. And remember that they did not suffer, death came with quick mercy."

"You're most comforting, mum," Lulu said, sniffling. "When do you think we can have the burial?"

"I don't know," Marcy said dully. "Not until the fire has been brought under control, I suppose. Let's put all the heartbreak behind us for the time being. Have you made coffee, Mary?"

"As best I could on the campfire," Mary said, pouring a cup from the granite pot. "It's strong as lye."

"Just what I need," Marcy said.

The front doorbell jangled, and Lulu hurried to answer. She came back ushering two of the most forlorn, bedraggled children Marcy had ever seen. Marcy stared at them a moment, then recognition dawned.

"Ruby! Mike!" she exclaimed. She said to the girls, "These are the two Fortune children. I gave them a ride after the quake. How does it go, kids?"

"Not very well," the girl said. "No word of our mother, and we're scairt. There wasn't much to eat in the park, anyhow, so I found your card, and we started walking as soon as it got light. Could we stay with you for a while?"

Before Marcy could answer, Mary said tersely, "No, you can't, child. This is a house of sadness and we ain't got—"

Marcy raised a hand to silence the woman. She said to Ruby, "Of course you can, kids. What Mary meant was that my father and my little boy were killed last night, and this is going to be a very sad place for a few days, I'm afraid."

The girl looked horrified. "If that's the case, we won't impose on you. We'll move on, I think."

"Move on where? Don't be so brave, kids," Marcy said. "We have plenty of room, and a well-stocked larder. You'll stay with us a week, or a month, if need be. Mary, get these children something to eat. Then get them cleaned up and find rooms for them. Mike can—he can have the nursery."

Lulu looked horrified, but she did not object, nor did Mary. They were bustling about the children when the doorbell rang again.

It was Dom Renfrow, looking a little more rested than he had the night before. His wife Rita was with him, and an older man who looked as if he was ready to drop.

"Dr. Beale, Marcy," Dom said. "His boss at the hospital said if he didn't get away he'd have a stroke, so Rita is taking him to our house where he can have a decent rest. I brought him by to certify death causes for your father and the child."

"Sorry to hear of your tragedy, Miss Tarrant," the doctor said. "If I could view the bodies—"

"Show him up to my father's room, Lulu," Marcy said. The doctor and Rita went up the stairs and a door closed.

"It wouldn't be proper to have the burial without an official death certificate," Dom said, dropping into a chair.

Marcy nodded wordlessly and poured him a cup of coffee.

"Marcy, the undertakers' business is practically inoperative," he went on. "So the boys at the shop are building the two coffins. We'll find a preacher by Sunday and have the funerals. I've already seen your father's friend, the sexton at Laurel Hills. I know this is painful, but—"

"I'm beginning to think all life is painful, Dom," she said, managing a wan smile. "Thank you for your kindness. Now, what about the fire? Is our building—"

"Safe," he said with satisfaction. "About one o'clock this morning, they licked the last of the Franklin Street fire, and they've held at Van Ness. Unless the wind changes, we're all right."

"That's a relief. I suppose it will be a while before we can pick up the pieces, and get Tarrant's moving again."

"It will take a while. But Marce, due to your father's foresight, we're going to be in a hell of a lot better position than most firms. We have a building and some stock to sell, and all our books and records. As soon as the ashes cool, we'll be back selling cars."

At that moment Dr. Beale and Rita came back down the

stairs. The doctor sat at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee and wrote out the two certificates. He gave them to Marcy. "These will do until we get things straightened out," he said. "Then I'll exchange them for official ones. Miss Tarrant, my deepest sympathy. That sweet little boy—" he shook his head. "If it is of any slight consolation to you, both of them died instantly."

As the three were about to leave, Rita Renfrow put her arms around Marcy and murmured words of sympathy. Marcy walked to the door with them.

"What will you do today, Marcy?" Dom asked.

"Dom, I can't sit here and brood over my woes," she said. "Especially when there are thousands of others with tragedies as great as my own. I've seen the suffering; it's beyond any imagination. Maybe there is something I can do about it. The Committee of Fifty is quartered at Franklin Hall just a few blocks away. I'm going to volunteer myself and my car once again, to do what I can."

"Good girl," Dom said. Putting his arm about her shoulders he gave her a brief hug, then ran down the steps to his waiting car. Rita and Dr. Beale seemed to have already dropped off to sleep as Dom cranked the car.

Marcy gave a deep sigh and went into the house to find duster and driving gloves. The Oldsmobile, she saw, was parked in front where Cal Plumb had left it for her.

CHAPTER XII

Taking care of the two Fortune children would give Mary and Lulu something to do, but Marcy knew she must get out of this house of sadness. Marcy thought dully that she was weary and feeling ill, drained of emotion. She knew she must immerse herself in work, and God knew she was needed badly enough. She'd report to Franklin Hall and the Committee of Fifty; they'd find some use for her and her car.

She told Mary Tupper of her plans as Mary fixed some breakfast for Logan Cresap, down at last from his vigil on the roof. The old man was red-eyed and weary, yet filled with satisfaction.

"They licked her at Franklin a couple hours ago, Miss Marcy," he said, spreading a great dollop of butter on a slice of bread. "Oh, it was a fearsome sight last night, all the way from Van Ness to East Street there was parallel lines of fire. Pretty as a pitcher, yet it would scare a man to death. Is there anything I can help to do about—" he jerked his head in the direction of the upstairs bedrooms.

"Not a thing, Logan, thank you, beyond praying for their souls," Marcy said. She slipped into a light jacket and pulled on a pair of driving gloves.

The old coachman rubbed a knuckle against his tearful eyes. "Ah, 'tis a sad thing, sad. There was never a better man than Tom Tarrant, and the little feller, so sweet, so lively." He dropped the slice of bread on his plate and buried his face in his hands.

With a catch in her throat, Marcy said, "I'm going now. I'll try to get back from time to time, Mary. I'll surely be home by dinnertime."

"Be careful, Miss Marcy," Logan Cresap said, wiping his damp eyes with a crumpled handkerchief. "There's a new threat. I seen it from the roof. The wind has changed and they're dynamiting north of Union. If they don't stop it—"

"Dear God, will it never end?" Mary Tupper exclaimed. Without answering, Marcy touched the woman consolingly

on the shoulder and went out. She started the touring car and backed it out onto the street.

At the curb in front of the next house stood a carriage, its sleek team hitched, the coachman dozing on the seat. The Preblemanns, an elderly couple, quite well-to-do, had held their equipage ready for two days. They had not wanted to evacuate their house until it was absolutely necessary, for Abraham Preblemann was old and feeble and had a bad heart.

Marcy was about to put the Oldsmobile in gear to drive to Franklin Hall, when around the corner came a delivery wagon, drawn by a shaggy team of grays. In the single seat was a young man in civilian clothes, while the man driving wore the blue uniform of the U.S. Army. Behind the seat knelt another man in uniform, this one wearing the chevrons of a sergeant. He held a rifle cradled in an elbow.

The driver braced his feet and hauled on the reins, stopping his team beside the Preblemann carriage. The three men jumped out, and the coachman sat up with a start.

Not liking the look of this, Marcy pulled on the hand brake and jumped out of her car. She hurried up to the carriage.

The civilian said to the coachman, "No use arguing, fellow. We want this rig and we want it now, and you're going to drive it."

The cavalier manner of the civilian irked Marcy. She demanded, "What's going on here?"

The big, rather handsome young man pushed his hat back on his forehead and scratched his ear. "I don't know that it's any put-in of yours, young fellow—oh, excuse me, miss. Anyhow, I'm requisitioning this rig on the authority of the Committee of Fifty."

"But they can't do this, Miss Tarrant," the coachman protested. "The old folks will die of fright if they don't see me sitting here ready to take them away if the fire spreads."

"He's right, sir. You simply can't do this," Marcy said. "Mr. Preblemann is old and frail. He has a heart condition."

"I can do this, and I will," the man retorted. "Our need is desperate. It burns me up to see you fat cats standing on your privileges, while others by the thousands have sacrificed everything. You're a bunch of selfish—"

Marcy interrupted him. "You talk of lack of sacrifice, sir," she said witheringly. She pointed toward her home. "In that house my father and my little boy lie dead, killed last

night by dynamiters who didn't know their job. How many of your family have made that sacrifice?"

The man jerked off his hat "Oh, miss, I'm sorry. My apologies, believe me. I'm William Denman, a lawyer. When the Committee of Fifty found they had upward of a hundred thousand refugees in Golden Gate Park, and hardly any food, they authorized me to take Sergeant Smith and Private Dupree and requisition vehicles to bring supplies. So I'm gathering every thing on wheels I can find. Those people in the Park are starving, miss—Miss Tarrant, is it?"

"Yes, I know about the refugees. I was there twice yesterday on errands of mercy." She paused, looking at him speculatively. "Mr. Denman, the Preblemanns are a special case. So I'll make you a trade. Leave their carriage alone, and I'll drive my car in your parade, as many trips as we need. Is that a deal?"

Denman glanced at the big touring car at the curb, which would obviously carry two or three times the amount of supplies that a carriage would. He smiled, and thrust out a hand. "It's a deal. Moreover, if it's all right with you, I'll make it my command vehicle." He hesitated. "No hard feelings for my rough manners?"

"None," she said, managing a smile. "Come, let's get started. Where are the supplies?"

"Down at the Folsom Street pier," he said, climbing in the front seat. The sergeant with his rifle got in the back, while Private Dupree stayed with the delivery wagon.

Marcy started the Olds and turned at the corner. She slowed as Denman stood in the seat and waved a come-on to the long line of vehicles waiting there. With the big touring car in the lead, the parade turned into Van Ness and moved on to the Folsom Street pier. The wide avenue was empty now except for the big pumpers in tandem sucking water from the bay to hold the fire that was trying to jump Union from the north, again threatening the Western Addition.

Off to the right she could see smoke and flames in the region of Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill. Yet in spite of all obstacles and the great peril of being trapped, Marcy managed to lead the Denman caravan to Fort Mason, and around on East Street to the Folsom pier. In the bay dozens of boats in all sizes were evacuating the residents of the threatened North Beach Sailors and marines from the cruiser *Chicago*, which had arrived the night before, were helping to keep order. Tugs and Navy and city fireboats poured

their great streams of water onto the piers, trying to save them from the embers carried through the air by the northwest wind.

Later Marcy could not remember exactly how the caravan had reached Folsom Street, but there were the supplies, flour, bread, bacon, ham, barrels of crackers, firkins of butter, a thousand other things. The men loaded supplies indiscriminately into the wagons and carriages and other oddly assorted vehicles. Marcy heard Denman cursing with heartfelt fervor because he had started with twenty-four vehicles, and arrived with only twenty-three. One of his impressed drivers had escaped along the line.

With the Olds loaded until its springs creaked, Marcy and Denman brought loads of supplies to Golden Gate Park, where they were met by cheers from a surprisingly orderly crowd. Marcy learned that they were doubly welcome because some time before the food being dispensed by Rabbi Voorsanger at the YMHA at Page and Stanyon had run out completely.

All that day Marcy worked with William Denman and his men. By evening they had established and manned and supplied seven distribution centers, and the number of vehicles had grown to fifty. (That was to grow to one hundred twenty-two before the next day was over.)

At six o'clock Denman saw that Marcy was ready to drop, and sent her home. Bone-weary, she did not argue with him, but promised to meet him in the morning to continue the food distribution. For food supplies were arriving from everywhere, by the carload, the trainload. The problem was to get it to the refugees.

As she got into the car, Denman took her hand and said, "Miss Tarrant, you've been a tower of strength. I don't know how I would have made it without you. You have my thanks, and the thanks of the Committee. You've shown such courage, under circumstances that must have been tearing you apart. My most sincere admiration, young lady."

She put the car in gear. "It kept my mind off my terrible loss, Bill Denman. So many others, so many thousands of others, who are suffering, so many who don't know what the fate of their loved ones has been. At least, I've been spared that horror."

"Good girl," he said, and stepping back, gave her a salute of goodbye.

As she worked with Denman and his men on Saturday, she felt a new lift, a new optimism among the people. They

were getting food now, they had improvised shelter, and the Army had brought in hundreds of tents for shelter, as well. And after three days of an inferno, the fire was at last conquered, to all intents. The ruins still smoldered, some charred corpses still lay unburied, some lost souls were never to be found. Yet with indomitable spirit, the rich, the poor, the homeless, all began to look to the future.

The damage statistics were appalling, as Marcy was to hear later. Property damage was at least four hundred fifty millions of dollars; five hundred twenty square blocks, or 2,593 acres; 28,188 buildings had been destroyed, and two hundred sixty-one miles of streetcar and cable lines. And saddest of all, the dead numbered at least seven hundred—the actual count would never be known.

It turned cold on Sunday, and began to rain, adding to the misery of the homeless, but extinguishing the last of the burning embers, though smoke would drift upward and the ground stay hot for weeks to come. Marcy dressed warmly against the weather, knowing the cemetery would be a dismal place on this cold and cheerless day. For today they would bury Thomas Joseph Tarrant and Thomas Michael Tarrant.

Dom Renfrow, always resourceful, had found an Episcopalian priest. He intoned the office for the dead as the men from Tarrant Motors, as pallbearers, brought the two caskets from the upstairs in the Tarrant home. Not rough boxes, these, though the materials were scavenged from any fortuitous source. But the men were mechanics. The large coffin and the small one were beautifully finished, and fitted with polished hardware gleaned from some unrevealed source.

The hearse was the big LaFrance truck, with Cal Plumb, in his best black suit, driving, with Del Pellegrini beside him. Behind it, Logan Cresap drove the Oldsmobile, with its fabric top up. In the car rode Marcy, Mary and Lulu, and the Fortune children. Other men from the garage, with a few of the Tarrant neighbors, followed in the four cars which had been returned from emergency service. The other three would never be seen again And at the rear was Dominic Renfrow, with his wife Rita and Beulah Danaher, and Father Allerton, the priest.

The truck, with a tarpaulin over its sad burden, turned in at the cemetery gate, and Logan Cresap and the other cars followed. The ceremony was brief, for the cold rain was driving harder now. Father Allerton gave a short but moving eulogy, brought the church ritual to a conclusion,

and dropped a pinch of earth on each casket. The sexton of Laurel Hill directed the lowering of the caskets, and it was over.

Marcy held up bravely until that moment, then the immensity of her loss overwhelmed her. Her father, who had been father, adviser, confidant, partner—was it possible he was gone from her? And Tommy, that mischievous imp with the black curly hair, the ingenuous smile, and the all-encompassing love for "Mommy and Grampa," he would never grow up, he would be forever four years old. He and Tough Tom Tarrant would stroll through Elysian fields and gravely discuss the newest motor cars, and wonder how Mommy was getting along, and Mary, and Lulu.

Her shoulders shaking, she turned blindly to Dom Renfrow and Rita. They comforted her, held her close, until she had regained her composure.

"I'm sorry," Marcy sobbed, "but the world seems so empty. Maybe it will get easier in time, but right now, Dom, it's—it's just plain hell."

"I know what you're feeling," Rita said. "When we lost our baby—but then I still had Dom to help me through it. Marcy, come and stay with us a few days, until the worst edge of this is past."

Marcy dried her eyes with her handkerchief, and shook her head. "You are both so dear, and I appreciate it. But there's so much to do, there are so many people hurting. No, I'll stick it out as long as I can. I've got to work this out for myself. I know it won't be easy, but I'm a Tarrant. We come from tough peasant stock, and we've seen the world end before."

Marcy did stick it out, dividing her time between the relief work until it was taken over by the Red Cross and other agencies, and the rehabilitation of Tarrant Motors. Thanks to her father's foresight, they had stock and parts to work with The building needed repairs, and so did the house on Franklin. Being a bricklayer in post-quake San Francisco was like owning a gold mine, Marcy learned, as she tried to get the needed work done.

When the work of the young lawyer, William Denman, was finished, he released Marcy and her car. He said, "Marcy, thank you from the bottom of my heart. You're a real brick. And say, I'm going to come into Tarrant Motors to see you one of these days. I rather thought the automobile was a mere toy, but I've seen what it can do. The motor

car really came of age here, and I'm going to have one. Keep me in mind."

"Tarrant's will sell it to you," Marcy promised, smiling. "And thank you, Bill, for helping me over a bad time. It still aches, but it's beginning to get a little easier to bear."

The week passed, and on Saturday Marcy was helping Beulah Danaher get the Tarrant offices back into operation. Dom Renfrow came in, and stopped short. He said, "Marcy, you look like the devil. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Just tired, Dom, tired and depressed and feeling sorry for myself. I'll work out of it."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. You're going to get out of here before we carry you out. Listen, you've got to have a rest in peace and quiet. You need someone to baby you and give you a shoulder to cry upon. And I know just the person. Your Aunt Dora. You've always been close to her, and I know she'd love to have you as long as you want to stay."

"Oh, I couldn't do that, Dom," Marcy protested. "There's too much to be done."

"The hell with that! I hear the roadblocks have been removed. You take the old Ferroni runabout and take the ferry to Marin County. The telegraph lines are open. I'll send Dora a wire that you are coming. She'll be tickled."

Marcy sighed, knowing he was right, knowing the weight of those past ten days was telling on her. She felt so weary, so drained of all zest and even imagination. And Dora had been wired only the bare fact of the deaths of Tom Tarrant and Tommy. Suddenly the idea seemed a happy one, to go to Napa and rest and be comforted by one she loved.

"Send the wire, Dom," she said. "I'll go home and pack."

CHAPTER XIII

Marcy drove the Vinca runabout up the ferry ramp at Sausalito. At the top of a rise, she stopped the car and looked across the Gate to the city. Though she had been through it, she still found it hard to comprehend the devastation. Block after block of ash and char, with fragments of building walls protruding like the decayed fangs of prehistoric animals. Only here and there could she see patches of greenery, for the intense heat had killed most vegetation. In some places wisps of smoke still rose from smoldering debris. Shading her eyes, Marcy thought she could still see the brave spot of color that was Mr. Dakin's American flag flying atop Russian Hill.

She drove on to San Rafael. In that lovely small city were cracked pavement and stripped facades, buildings twisted and crumpled, but only one or two places which had burned. As she took the road to the northeast, turning east at Ignacio and skirting the north end of the Bay, the signs of catastrophe diminished, and the terrain began to look normal once more.

As the devastated region dropped behind her, Marcy began to feel a lift of spirit. The green of the countryside, the serene blue of the water, the farmyards bright with spring bloom, all helped her to gain perspective, to realize that life would be normal again in time, though never the same as it had been those fateful days ago. *Dom was right,* she thought. *I need to get away. I can actually feel my taut nerves relaxing.*

Only now and again would something trigger the ache of her loss, a child playing in a yard, an older man carrying a sack of groceries, a stocky gentleman in an automobile, in suspenders and a battered felt hat. Then the poignancy, the desolation, would descend on Marcy again. She would thrust it aside, for she knew she could not yield. She must come to grips with life again. Time would serve as anodyne for her grievous wounds, but she must help in the process.

The small city of Napa seemed little damaged, though when she stopped at the two-story house of the Duplessises

a carpenter sawed at one end of the porch, and a brickmason worked on the tall chimney.

Now Dora, that dear woman, came flying out, and as Marcy stepped from the car she was smothered in Dora's arms.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how pleased we are to have you," Dora said, taking her arm and leading her toward the house. "Robert has taken the morning off. He's inside watching the baby. Come along, we must hear all about everything. Marcy, we can't tell you how our hearts go out to you."

Robert Duplessis hugged Marcy and kissed her warmly on each cheek. He was as handsome as she remembered him, still the perfectly urbane gentleman, still following with affection every move Dora made.

The child Adrienne was more than a year old now, and already a toddler. She cooed at Marcy as she was gathered up, and touched Marcy's dimple with a finger, and made a number of observations aloud in a clearly sentient language of her own.

Putting the little girl down, Marcy said, "Oh, she's a darling, Aunt Dora. I'm so happy for you and Robert."

"And we are happy," Dora said, her pretty face radiant. She gathered up the child. "While I put this imp down for a nap, you two go into the parlor. Perhaps Robert can give you a glass of his finest wine."

As Dora went upstairs, Marcy went into the parlor with her new uncle. She noted on the piano pictures of herself, her father, and little Tommy, of Patsy and the Leightons, but none of Costains or Demarets. Robert must have felt the quarrel deeply, she thought.

Robert Duplessis poured Marcy a glass of white port. "From my own Golden Valley Wineries," he said. "It will win us some medals, I'm sure. Marceline, we love having you. How are you feeling now?"

"Still shaken, Robert, and my nerves are badly frayed," she said. "But a few days with you and Dora will help me get straightened out. Tell me, are you glad you left France?"

He smiled, and with thumb and forefinger gave a twist to the spiked mustache. "Marcy, you'll never know. I am my own man here—except for the supervision of my dear wife, you understand. I have work I love. I am doing things, creating things, I could never do before. But Marcy, tell me of yourself You were in Europe last summer. Did you see any of the Costains and Demarets?"

"I made the acquaintance of a fine young man named André Costain. And I had some business dealings with Jacques. You knew he was dead?"

Duplessis nodded. "Without details. Though Jacques had his faults, I felt he was my friend. It was *Maman*—"

Marcy nodded. "You knew Jacques killed himself? Robert, I had a business conference with him, regarding export fees for Tarrant Motors. We had dinner that night in his apartment, a marvelous dinner. After that we talked of many things. He was resentful of the way his mother held him down, and scoffed at many of his ideas. 'An errand boy only,' he told me. Then his injuries began paining him and I helped him to get ready for bed, and left. He arose the next morning, wrote some notes, and then shot himself."

Duplessis looked at her, seeming to know that she was leaving things unsaid. "But, Marcy, his submission to his mother had been going on for years. For it to become a reason for suicide seems strange, unless it was growing worse."

"It wasn't the whole reason," Marcy said, drawing a deep breath. "Robert, the auto accident preyed on him, guilt for the death of that girl. But most of all, the accident had left him impotent."

Like a true gentleman, Robert Duplessis did not ask her how she knew. He said, "Ah, that would explain it. Jacques was inordinately fond of his virility, and his conquests. Perhaps it was a compensation for being dominated by his mother. If his will for romance, his ability to act, was destroyed, he would have felt that life had no further use to him."

"A note he left for me said exactly that," Marcy said. "Have you had any contact with the American Costains?"

He smiled gravely. "It would contaminate them in their dealings with *Maman*, I'm afraid. You see, her long arm reaches across the ocean and a continent to impress her will on her slaves. It is really too bad she was not here ten days ago. She would not have permitted the earthquake to happen, that woman of iron will." His gray eyes sparkled at the thought.

Dora came down the stairs and into the room. "All settled," she reported. "Marcy, a piece of news you haven't heard, I'm sure. Your cousin Patsy has a new baby—a little boy."

For a moment Marcy was stunned. Then joy filled her heart. So wonderful for Pat and her husband, after so many months of disappointment. "When was it?" she asked.

"Last week. The baby wasn't expected for three weeks, but when the earthquake struck, Claribel got worried, and got Patsy and her husband on the first boat they could manage and took them up to the country place in Marin County. It must have been hectic, for the next evening Patsy went into labor, and would you know it, Claribel delivered the child! Pat is fine and so is the baby, the telegram said."

"That was in the evening of the nineteenth?" Marcy asked.

"Yes, about seven o'clock."

Marcy gave a little cry. She looked at her aunt. "God has infinite mercy, Dora," she said, feeling tears burning hotly at her eyelids. "That is the time, perhaps to the minute, that my small Tommy was—was killed."

"Do you think—is it possible?" Dora gasped Devoutly she made the sign of the cross. "It's too far-fetched for a coincidence. It must be a miracle. Marcy, Tommy was Patsy's natural child, wasn't he?"

"Now that he is gone, I need not keep the secret any longer. He was hers. She didn't want him, and I fell in love with him, so I took him." She took a sip of the excellent wine. "Claribel knows, of course. Patsy told her."

Dora gave her niece a strange look. "That's odd. Patsy has never mentioned it, and Cham, who loved your little boy, often said how lucky you were to have him."

"I was. Then as Daddy said, Aunt Claribel must have been bluffing," Marcy said, biting her lip. The thought came to her then: why stir up family trouble? Tommy was gone; he could not be hurt now. *Let it end here, Marcy, let it end here,* she told herself She said, "It's nothing, Dora. My father wasn't very fond of Aunt Claribel, you know, though he loved Patsy."

"That's right. Marcy, what about your handsome count in Italy? I know you were quite taken with him."

"He's in America, somewhere in America. Where, I don't know," Marcy said. Quickly she told of her visit with him, the Milan Cinquecento which they had nearly won. She skipped over most of her idyllic week with Carlo, told of his later financial troubles, how his world had been brought down around him by the Costains, and his flight to America. "I'll never forgive Mme. Demaret for what she did to him," she said. "Nor Paul Costain."

"I heard young Paul had been promoted from the London office to be *Maman's* right hand man in Paris," Robert

Duplessis said. "I doubt if he will be as malleable as Jacques was. They must have a strong man at the helm of Costain *Frères*, too."

"I don't follow you, Robert," Marcy said.

"Why, this earthquake. San Francisco was one of the most heavily insured cities of the world. A most lucrative business, which was brought to *Maman's* attention by Norbert Costain, of Costain Brothers. So Costain *Frères* set up a subsidiary in Paris which they call Assurance Costain. I would guess that Assurance Costain will have over ten million dollars in claims filed against it. Mme. Demaret liked to have every franc from the till out working, so Costain *Frères* is spread very thin across Europe and America. I can't guess what a huge loss will do to them, but I am not displeased with the certainty that it will rock them from cellar to roof tiles." He grinned wolfishly. "Nor do I know anyone I would sooner see it happen to!"

The thought did not displease Marcy, either. With Jacques gone, whom she had loved in her own way, she had no grief for Costain *Frères*. André Costain she liked greatly, but by his own account he was well below the exalted circles of the Costain hierarchy. She knew she was being bitter and uncharitable, but how charitable had the Costains been to that fine man, Carlo Ferroni?

As the days passed in the pleasant calm of the Napa valley, Marcy began to feel life coming back into her body, and peace to her soul. She spent pleasant evenings with the Duplessises, ate well, went to bed early and slept late. She rode with Robert through the fields of exactingly cultivated grapes. She was shown through the winery, so aseptic and so carefully chilled. With the nursemaid looking after little Adrienne, Marcy and Dora spent a sunny afternoon in the cool of the Golden Valley reception room, sampling the various types of wine produced there, for which Robert Duplessis was beginning to be noted.

Marcy was feeling no pain, and Dora was pleasantly tipsy, when they drove home in the Vinca. Her aunt was in a philosophical mood, extolling the joys of married life, and how idyllic it had become for her with Robert. "Marcy, I didn't know what living was until I was past thirty-five," she said. "Just think, what if I hadn't gone to Europe? What if I hadn't met Robert? What if he hadn't taught me how wonderful it can be between a man and a woman? Oh, Marcy!"

"But it did happen, Dora," Marcy said. "Don't get in a tizzy about might-have-beens. I only wish I could have been as lucky."

'Oh, I know, you are still burning a torch in your heart for Carlo Ferroni," Dora said. "You run that man down, Marce. He's too nice and too handsome to let get away."

"I agree," Marcy said, laughing. "But how, dear Dora? That is one proud man. He is not going to come to me a beggar, hat in hand. He must build a new success with his own hands, before he gets in touch with me again. Meantime I grow old and gray, and sigh with unrequited love."

"Humph!" Dora snorted. "That's because you're not aggressive enough. You advised me once to go after Robert tooth and nail, and I did. Got him, too. Now Marcy, you listen to me. Send inquiries to motor car manufacturers, get the Pinkertons on his trail. Don't be chary about the methods you use. Find him no matter what it takes. Or how much. For I know you, Marceline Tarrant. I can see it in your eyes and hear it in your voice that you will never be happy until you are married to Carlo."

"Darn it, I'm afraid you're right, Aunt Dora," Marcy said.

As the gentle days drifted by, Marcy's mental attitude continued to improve. Physically, too, she was getting back into the trim shape she tried always to maintain. With tennis, horseback riding, and an occasional swim, her health returned.

"Marcy, you're positively blooming," her aunt said.

"That's a sign, Auntie dear, that my visit is nearly over," Marcy said.

"Oh, dear, stay longer, another week, a month—"

Marcy shook her head. "Tomorrow I must go. A thousand things to do, including an estate to settle, remember? And Tarrant Motors calls me. With Daddy's shares and my own I'll be the major stockholder. And we have problems. The building needs repair, so does our house. We have cars to sell, and new ones coming in by ship and by rail. And there's our new Rolls-Royce dealership to get cracking. Dora, I've loved it, and it has made a whole woman of me again. But duty calls."

Dora sighed. "I suppose. But Robert and I will miss you, and so will Adrienne. But in a way I envy you your career, so competent, so busy." Then she brightened. "Marcy, I'll never have to put my plan for San Francisco into effect, but you can do it for me."

"What plan is that, Auntie?"

"A dream. Now that the city is nearly destroyed, let's push all of it, the whole mass of rubble, into the bay. Then we'll build a new city the way it ought to be, broad streets, central plazas, parks, beauty wherever you look."

"The Burnham plan, eh?"

"Yes. I was active on the Improvement Association that hired Samuel Hudson Burnham a couple years ago, and his project is still close to my heart."

"I went with you to several meetings, remember?"

"Oh, that's right. So you know that the Burnham plan is a beautiful thing, and practical, too. He foresees the coming of the motor car, replacing the horse. I can't get down there to help, but my sweet niece, promise that you will do everything you can to get Daniel Burnham's plan adopted."

"I'll try, Auntie, I promise. Mr. Burnham is a dreamer, but not a wild-eyed one. He's quite practical. And you are right that no city ever had such a chance to build to an ideal. I'm sure there isn't a chance in God's world to get all the Burnham features into our reconstruction, but I promise you I'll fight for every inch of it we can twist away from the new Committee of Fifty, and the city's Board of Supervisors."

"If there's graft in it, they'll go along with you," Dora said grimly.

"There will be graft. Abe Rust will see to that," Marcy said. "But I'm afraid our opposition will be able to offer more opportunities for graft than we will."

"I suppose it will be impossible to keep those vultures on the Board simon-pure," Dora said. "But graft or no graft, I'd like to see San Francisco rise from her ashes, like the phoenix. Marcy, look up Inez Cholchester, the realtor, and Signe Johansen of the Blue Star Line. They were both active and I'm sure will be again. If anyone can put over the Burnham plan, it would be you three women."

"I'll try my damnedest Aunt Dora," Marcy said sincerely.

CHAPTER XIV

One of the first questions Marcy asked the morning she returned to her duties at Tarrant Motors was, "Has there been any word of Carlo Ferroni?" Carlo had been often in her mind during her stay with Dora Duplessis and the Chevalier. The aching void in her life left by the loss of her father and Tommy was made deeper by the inexplicable silence of Carlo Ferroni.

Beulah Danaher looked at Marcy through steel-rimmed glasses. She shook her head. "Not a word, Marcy," she said. "But here's some good news for the boss of Tarrant Motors." She handed Marcy a cablegram.

Marcy read it. "Oh, good," she said. "So they'll ship our first Rolls-Royce cars after the first of the year. I wish it were sooner, but it can't be helped, I suppose. Beulah, I'll see that you're one of the first to ride in one."

"Ride, nothing!" the middle-aged secretary said tartly. "I'll be driving it myself. Del Pellegrini has been teaching me. He tells me I'm darned good, considering the state of our city streets."

"What an awful mess they are! Beulah, I'm going to see that you have a car of your own soon. By the way, is there a report on the seven units we loaned to the Committee?"

"Four are back, though they're in such shape Cal's boys must practically rebuild them. One was destroyed when the big tank of the Gas Company blew up. One went over the cliff at Lombard Street and burned. And one—well, it just disappeared, stolen, we suppose. By the grace of God none of our boys got hurt in their driving. And your father, God rest him, had the foresight to cache our best cars, so Tarrant's is still in business."

"We are that. So, Beulah, we've got to have a council of war. Get everyone together for four o'clock, you, Dom, Cal, Del Pellegrini, and I suppose you know where to locate Sandy Woodworth. We'll need him. And, oh, yes, my Uncle Cham Laughlin."

"I'll see to it," Beulah said. "Marcy, here's a number you are to call. Signe Johansen, of the Blue Star Line. Her

phone is working at the Blue Star pier, and she says it's very important."

Marcy knew and admired the blonde, lissome Norwegian girl who, from a mere poor relation of the wealthy Johansens, had worked her way by sheer merit to a position of office manager for the big shipping line.

Signe answered her telephone with that delightful Scandinavian accent of hers. "Marceline? So nice to hear from you. Listen, we need your help."

"You'll have it if it's in my power."

"Good. Inez Colchester and I want you at the meeting today of the Committee of Fifty. The Burnham plan is coming up for consideration, and we've got to plead for it."

"I'm committed, not only for myself and Tarrant Motors, but for my Aunt Dora. The Burnham plan is so close to her heart, as you know, Signe."

The Norwegian girl sighed. "A shame she can't be here, but with the new baby, and living in Napa—but I'm sure you will take her place formidably, Marcy. One o'clock, then, at the street railway warehouse. You know where it is."

Signe Johansen and Inez Colchester were waiting outside the stark walls of the warehouse when Marcy drove up. The three found seats near the front of the improvised meeting room. Mrs. Colchester, a middle-aged, rather dumpy little woman, belied her appearance, for she was one of the shrewdest realtors in San Francisco, who after the death of her husband, had carried on the real estate business with such skill and acumen that she was now a millionaire several times over.

Looking around, Marcy saw her Uncle Cham seated a few rows back. He smiled at her and waved a hand, and she smiled back. Patsy, she had learned, was still at the country place in Marin County, since the Laughlin house on Russian Hill had been lost in the fire. They had managed to save most of their valuables, but were homeless.

Marcy had dressed with care for the meeting, knowing that many of the elite of the city would be present. And since these same people would probably be customers of Tarrant Motors, it would do no harm to make the best of impressions. So she was wearing a fitted blue suit of rather mannish cut, topped by a pert sailor hat on her red hair. Her ensemble was almost severe in its lack of adornment, with merely a froth of lace at the throat to give it a feminine touch. Though Inez Colchester's plump hands coruscated with diamonds, Marcy's hands bore only a single ring

set with a Yogo sapphire, to match the pendant that Barry Olden had given her that Christmas so long and long ago.

H. Rogers Spengler, of the streetcar system, stood up, cleared his throat, and got the meeting started. After a few welcoming remarks, he referred to a slip of paper in his hand, and said, "Since the first item on our agenda is consideration of the Burnham plan for the reconstruction of our city, I will call on Inez Colchester."

The realtor strode to the front of the room and faced her audience with a note of defiance. At her nod, Spengler unrolled a sketch map on an easel beside her. With a yardstick for a pointer, Mrs. Colchester, in a clear impersonal voice, began explaining the map.

"Most of you know this ideal plan on which our friend Daniel Burnham spent more than two years," she said. "But I'll go over it briefly. If we implement it—when we implement it, I should say—San Francisco will be the most beautiful, the best-planned, the most livable city in all the world."

She went on to show the central hub, the radiating streets, the open parks, the wide avenues for access. At the end she said, "We have gone through a catastrophe. It has been a terrible experience. Yet let us use the opportunity it has provided for us. From the blackened ruins of a city that just grew without plan or reason, let us rebuild in a fashion that will make us the envy of all America, even the world."

There was a smattering of applause as she sat down. Next Spengler called on Signe Johansen, who spoke briefly on the opportunity to improve the port area, the gateway to the city, now that the dives and congested produce areas had been wiped clean. She said, "Not only will the Burnham plan provide easy access to the dock areas, but to the tourist coming in by liner or by ferry, our city will be so beautiful it will make the tourist gasp in awe and wonder. Gentlemen and ladies, we must not, *must not,* let this opportunity slip through our fingers."

When she had finished, Spengler said, "And now, the third member of our distaff contingent, Miss Marceline Tarrant."

Going to the front of the room, Marcy sensed in her audience an attitude of indifference, an air of tolerance for vain argument on an issue already decided. Yet she must do her part as she so passionately saw it. She could feel that her effort, and that of the two other women, was in a cause that was lost. Yet she had to persist.

She took Mrs. Colchester's yardstick and pointed to the

main access routes to the city. She said, "I am in the motor car business, so I think differently from most of you. Your thinking is still in the horse-and-buggy era. You have not yet accepted the fact that we are going through a revolution in transport. The horse, gentlemen, is on its way out. Thirty years from now the phaeton, with its spanking team of sleek horses, will be a mere curiosity. Our streets will be crowded with automobiles, with trucks and omnibuses, and not a horse to be seen."

She put down the pointer. "You think I am a dreamer?" she asked. "I am not. I'm telling you facts. Now it is only the wealthy who can maintain a horse and carriage. There will come a day when it will be the exception for a family *not* to own an automobile. The pressure of traffic will be such that we will have to build a great bridge over the Golden Gate, and perhaps another across the Bay to Oakland. And that, gentlemen and ladies, is why we must put the Burnham plan into effect. Only the wide avenues, the efficient grid of streets, will be able to handle the tremendous traffic flow of the future."

As she returned to her seat, both Signe Johansen and Inez Colchester whispered congratulations. Pleased, Marcy sat down.

"In rebuttal to the impassioned and quite expert plea of our ladies, I present Mr. Quincy Yount, of the Board of Supervisors, speaking in opposition to the Burnham plan," the chairman said.

Quincy Yount was a fleshy man, pink with the ruddy skin of good living. His shock of silvery hair gave him a benign appearance. He stared at the crowd, fingering the striped cravat knotted at his high wing collar.

"He's *not* the honest one of the eighteen," Inez Colchester whispered.

Yount cleared his throat. Looking straight at Marcy, he said, "I hate to puncture the toy balloon Miss—Tarrant, is it?—has so prettily inflated before you. She is dreaming the same kind of dreams that floated in the smoke of the opium dens of Chinatown. A bridge across the Golden Gate? What a fantasy, gentlemen. The greatest engineers of the U.S.A. have looked at that possibility and put thumbs down on it as totally impossible. And her dreams of the automobile displacing the horse are just as fantastic."

His tone changed from unctuous to ironic. "Miss Tarrant sells these luxury machines. I wish she would tell me how every family will own one of them, when a man, a working

man like myself, cannot afford one, and I am not without funds." He scowled at a titter from the room. "Not that I wouldn't like to own one, for they are the mark of the elite, a rich man's toy Some day, perhaps, I will, but until then I must stay with my team and carriage. Now as for this idiotic plan of Sam Burnham's, never have I seen such a waste of money on a scrap of paper!"

He waved a hand at the map. "Broad avenues, open spaces, central malls, indeed! Gentlemen, what we have to do is get busy rebuilding as fast as we can. We are losing thousands, millions in trade every day to other cities, other ports. I say, forget this visionary potpourri, and get to work!" If there had been a dais, he would have pounded on it. "Let's get the ashes and the debris hauled away, the dead buried, the hungry fed, and get our city rebuilt without the slightest delay! This is a job for men, men with guts and stamina and ability, no matter what pretty, inexperienced girls may try to tell us."

Anger flamed in Marcy. She was about to spring to her feet, when Signe's strong hand restrained her. "It's no use, Marcy," Signe whispered. "Can't you feel it? The Burnham plan is out. Let's try at future meetings to salvage any part of it we can. We'll have to settle for that."

"I'm afraid you're right," Marcy said dully. Then she lifted her head and stared at Quincy Yount, the man smiling slightly, secure in his triumph. He too could read audiences. Marcy said bitterly, "Anybody but that pompous ass wouldn't rile me so badly. He's like the Judas goat leading a flock of sheep."

"There, there, dear," Inez Colchester said, patting Marcy's hand. "Yount sees a way to chisel a few thousands, or millions, for himself, you see. I know he owns some valuable lots in the area of the old Barbary Coast. He'll jerrybuild some quarters there, and have his brothels running full blast by September."

"And that part of town will be just as flimsy and rotten as it was before the fire," Signe said tersely.

"Not quite," Inez Colchester told her. "Just as rotten, built this time of steel and brick and stone. All to the glory of the great Quincy Yount and Abe Rust, and their delusions of grandeur."

After the meeting, Marcy was getting into her car when her uncle, Chalmers Laughlin, came up with the lawyer, William Denman.

"A fine presentation you girls made," her uncle said. "But unfortunately, you didn't have a chance. Too bad."

"Too damned bad," Denman said. "You see, Marcy, there's a legal flaw in the Burnham plan. Don't get me wrong. I'm all for it, just as you are. But the city does not have the legal right of eminent domain, so any land donated for parks and wide avenues and the other features Sam Burnham worked out would have to be just that, donated, since the city can't take it. And with their eyes on the almighty dollar, there are very few property owners who would give a single inch of property away, especially in the downtown area."

"And that's where we need it," Marcy said. "I suppose we might as well give up."

"No, hang in there, the way you did when we were hauling the food supplies," Denman said, smiling. "You may be able to get something out of it. A widened Market Street, a new and well-planned civic center, for example. Even Quincy Yount might go for that, if none of his acreage is involved."

"I know what I'd like to do to Mr. Quincy Yount," Marcy said grimly.

"I know just what you mean," Bill Denman said, laughing. He patted her on the shoulder and went off down the street.

Cham Laughlin said, "So nice to see you looking like yourself again, Marcy."

"The rest at Dora's was good for me," she said. "It's been a bitter time, Uncle Cham. I wasn't sure I was going to get through it."

"But you did," Cham said. "Good peasant stock, your father used to say. Marcy, come up to the Marin place when you have a chance. You've got to see our grandchild."

"I'll try," Marcy said. Her lack of enthusiasm must have been evident in her voice, for Cham said, "Marcy, please. You should know the boy doesn't look like—like Tommy."

"So I've heard," Marcy said. "I'll try, Uncle Cham. I'll try."

In the next few weeks, Tarrant Motors was back in full operation. Marcy's main problem was getting enough units to fill the demand. The automobile had truly come of age. Many of the cars of the wealthy had been destroyed in the fire, so there was a waiting list for the Saxon-Benz and the new line, the Rolls-Royce. The domestic cars were being sold as fast as they were delivered, and Marcy was in correspondence with Henry Ford, in Dearborn, to obtain the dealership for the economy car he would soon have in production.

Driving about the city, she was astonished at the progress of reconstruction. Market Street was now passable all the way to East Street and the Ferry building. The gutted shells of stone buildings were being pushed down and carted away. Many of the construction vehicles bore the insignias M-O-T: Marshall-Osweiler-Tarrant Construction. *The boys are doing right well,* she thought. *Daddy would be proud of them.* She determined to go out to their shops and visit them one day soon.

As Marcy was driving back one day from a pleasant lunch with Signe Johansen, a hansom cab with a skittish horse hurtled across the intersection just in front of her. When she hit the brakes hard, she found that they took hold unevenly. Returning to the shop, she told Cal Plumb her troubles.

"Need a little adjustment, probably," her foreman said. "I'll put my very best mechanic on it."

Engrossed in her work, excited at the impending arrival of the first Rolls-Royces, Marcy's afternoon slipped away. When the familiar noise of the shop quieted, she glanced at the clock and saw that it was quitting time. Wondering if her Vinca was ready, she went out into the shop.

The runabout was still in place over the pit. An electric bulb at the end of a long cord threw brightness and shadow beneath the car. The ladder below was occupied by a man whose head and shoulders were lost in the undercarriage. As she stood beside the car, the mechanic's wrench slipped, and a grunt of pain was followed by a muffled malediction.

"Are you nearly through?" she asked, stooping to look beneath the Vinca.

From the depths of springs and brakes and chassis a voice grunted, "Another fifteen minutes, I should say."

She straightened, staring down into what she could see of the repair pit. She walked over to Cal Plumb's little office.

"Cal, who is the mech working on my car?" she asked. "Is he new?"

"Just started a couple days ago. Name's Charles Smith. Worked for the cable car company a while, he said. I put him on your baby because he's a real whiz, especially on foreign makes like the Ferroni."

"I see," Marcy said slowly. She walked back across the shop, something nagging at her though she could not put a finger on it.

She heard the mechanic say from under the car, "Ah, good enough. That should do it." He turned the unshaded

bulb out, folded the short ladder, and came up the concrete steps at the far end of the pit. He began replacing his tools on the work bench, and as he did so he whistled absent-mindedly the tune of a ballad popular some years before.

Marcy's heart leaped, and she began to tremble. For the song was "After the Ball." She had taught it to Carlo Ferroni one carefree day on a wooded hill above the azure waters of Lake Como. She had heard him humming it one gray day in Padua, that day so rainy they had nothing better to do than stay in their hotel room and make love ardently and gently.

Could she be mistaken? She held her breath as she came up behind the coveralled figure at the workbench. She drew a deep breath. She said softly, "Carlo Ferroni?"

The man whirled, a wrench and a screwdriver clattering unheeded to the concrete floor. And it was—*it was*—Carlo, in the flesh, living, breathing, a few new lines on his bronzed face, but still as handsome as Marcy remembered him.

"Oh, Carlo!" Marcy cried, and was in his arms, laughing and sobbing at the same time. He held her gloriously, crushingly tight. Her lips found his in the kiss she had been aching for those long interminable months.

Breathless, she pulled away at last. At a sound she turned, his arm still affectionately about her shoulders. She saw Cal Plumb and those few of the crew who had not yet left the shop eyeing her and Carlo in amusement mixed with puzzlement.

She had the urge to stick her tongue out at them in childish derision. Instead she announced, "Cal, gentlemen, the man you know as Charles Smith is an old and dear friend of mine, Carlo Ferroni. He is—was—the designer and builder of the Vinca motor car."

Whitey Brackett, one of the younger mechanics, said in awe, "My God, this is the guy I was telling how to adjust the Vinca brakes!"

She introduced each of them to Carlo, and they shook his hand with friendly respect. When they were gone, and Cal Plumb had returned to his glassed cubicle, she said, "Come, Carlo, to my office. We must talk."

"One moment, Marcy," he said, and took off his coveralls, revealing clean but worn shirt and trousers. He took a well-cut but almost threadbare jacket from a hook and put it on. "Now I am respectable, no?" he asked, and followed her into the office that only short weeks before had been her father's.

She sat down in the swivel chair behind the big desk, and Carlo took a straight chair opposite her. For a minute they were silent, Marcy trying to adjust to the sudden joy of Carlo's tangible, breathing presence.

"So it's Charles Smith, is it?" she asked at last. "Oh, Carlo, you've made me suffer for months, knowing you were in America, but without a word from you. Were you sick? Had you been injured? Had someone murdered you? All those terrible thoughts nagged at me, and still no word from you. Why?"

He looked at her sadly. "So many things, *carissima.* I have been a broken man. Only now am I beginning to feel once more like Carlo Ferroni. You see—" His sigh was almost a groan. "One day I am successful maker of motor cars, I have my factory, I have the love and respect of my people. I have the beautiful Marcy Tarrant to dream about. The next day Costain *Frères* have taken my factory, my beloved Vinca from me. My other creditors swarm down on me like a flock of vultures. My estate is gone, even the little house where I proposed we live after we are married, that is gone too. And my people—they have no gratitude for what I have done for them. I think they are glad Vinca is being taken over by a rich firm. Only Umberto and a few others give me words of sympathy and loyalty."

"Dear Carlo, what a blow that must have been," she said.

"It was a bitter thing," he said, nodding. "So with just the few *lira* in my pocket, I go up to Lake Como, and I engage the room where love has joined me with my dear Marcy. For two days I sit and think, and I come to a decision. There is nothing left in Italy for Carlo, no business, no estate, no more obligation to the people of Novara who spurn me. So, I go to America, the land of opportunity. I sell what is left of my belongings, I find a freighter with cheap fare, and I sail for New York."

"Carlo, why didn't you cable us? We'd have been glad to—"

He looked at her with a slight smile, without answering. Then he went on. "At Ellis Island I have but sixteen *lira*, three English pounds, one hundred *francs*, and two American dollars in my pocket. So the immigration people are about to send me back, but I show them letters from Charles Kettering of Cadillac, and Ransom Olds, and Henry Ford, so they let me come in."

"And why did you not take the train for San Francisco?"

"Marcy, my dear one, it should be plain to you by now

that men are like little boys. They are too proud to admit defeat, instead they cringe and skulk until some good woman talks some sense into them. Here was Carlo Ferroni, broke, defeated, even his confidence in himself gone. He had nothing left but pride, in what he had once done. How could he run to cry on the shoulder of one who, of all people, was so dear and so loved?"

"I think I see," she said doubtfully. "But the suspense, the imagined things, were hard for me, Carlo. What did you do after you landed?"

"Well, my title of 'count' is genuine enough. I think maybe I find rich lady with marriageable daughter, and get rich quick. But I did not know any rich ladies, so I went to Boston and get work as garage mechanic. I fix Cadillacs, Oldsmobiles, Panhards."

"Not for John O'Brien at the Shamrock Garage on Boylston Street?" Marcy cried, delighted.

"The very same," Carlo said, looking at her in surprise. "How did you know of the good Sig. O'Brien?"

"He sold me my first car, and I kept it there when I was in school," she explained.

"He was a good employer. But winter comes and the work slacks off. So I was laid off—you see, I already talk in the American idiom. So I go west then, to Detroit, for I have had correspondence with Mr. Kettering about a cranking device. So he put me to work on his special program. Very nice man, Mr. Kettering, but after while his budget runs out and he has to stop for the time. He is, I think, a genius. He almost has his starter perfected."

"That will be an important day in our industry," Marcy said. "Then women will be able to have their own cars. We'll turn the horse out to pasture for good."

"I think so. Then I go to work for Mr. Henry Ford, who is working on a planetary transmission for a very cheap, very reliable car. For the working man, he tells me, and he expects to sell many thousands, even millions of them."

"Yes, we know about Mr. Ford. I've had a great deal of correspondence with him. When he brings out that cheap car, we want the agency for it," Marcy said.

"He is a very fine man, Mr. Ford, and I think he will succeed. But he was not an easy man to work for, so I get laid off again. I went west to Butte, Montana, and work in the machine shop for copper mines. After while I get tired of sharpening drill steel, so I move on west, to Portland, Oregon."

"Always coming nearer to San Francisco," Marcy said, with a smile.

"Why, that is so—I never thought of that," he said, with genuine surprise. He resumed his saga. "In Portland I become Charles Smith, for I find work at the garage where they handle Cadillac, Mercer and Vinca. *Dio mio*, Marcy, what those Demarets and Costains have done to my sweet machine. Cheap here, cheap there—I am glad the Ferroni name no longer goes on its radiator. The car is a disgrace, a sham, rotten." His disgust brought a deep growl in his throat.

"In Portland, I hear of the earthquake. What a terrible thing! And my dear Marcy, has she been hurt, is she sick? I must know, so I come here *rapidamente*. They put me to work, cleaning up rubble, digging up bodies—ugh!—and driving team. At last I learn that you are safe but your father and your little boy are killed. I feel terrible, Marcy, a fine man like Tom Tarrant, for a so-sweet small boy. What awful tragedy for you."

"I'm just getting over the numbness of it now, Carlo," she said. "I'm trying to begin life all over again."

"Only time will help," he said gently. "I know myself that is true."

"But why did you not come to me then?" she asked.

"I could not. When they found I was a mechanic, they put me to work on the streetcar system. They told me they would send me back to Italy if I did not keep on the job. Only when I had satisfied their demands could I come to Tarrant Motors. Even then I kept out of your way, for I am a proud man, Marcy, even though I have little to be proud of any more."

"Carlo, don't say that. It was the vindictiveness of Mme. Demaret and Paul Costain which ruined your work in Novara, not any lack in yourself. I wish, though, you hadn't brought that damnable false pride of yours with you to America. It kept you away from me when I needed you. When Daddy and Tommy were killed, I needed desperately a strong shoulder to cry upon. I was so alone, so bereft—" She covered her face with her hands.

He came around the desk, and put a strong hand on her shoulder. "Marcy, Marcy, forgive me! You seemed always so —how do you say it?—self-sufficient, so strong of character. I admired that in you, though it frightened me a little."

"I am not as strong as I seemed to you," she said. "But the very fact that you are here makes me feel like a giant. Let bygones be bygones. Carlo, tell me, why did you give up your good job at the street railway to come to Tarrant's?"

"Because you were here. And for better wages."

"Both reasons are important, I'm sure," she said, smiling a little. "But the practical angle can't be discounted."

"It can't," he said seriously. "Marcy, you deplored my stiff-necked pride. But it is all that is left of my heritage. The Ferronis were great people, important people for centuries. Though they went to seed, they kept the name respected and revered. That same pride has made me send, since I came to America, every bit of my earnings that I could spare to pay off the rest of the Ferroni debts. I will not rest until every *lira*, every *centesmi* is paid off. Thank God I am cutting the balance down to size."

"Carlo, you're still a darling. But please, please, don't vanish into thin air again. I just—I just couldn't stand it."

He took her hand in his callused palm. "I promise. And when payday comes, I promise to take one beautiful red-headed woman out to dinner."

"Let's go tonight!" she said eagerly. "I'll pay the tab."

He looked at her sternly. "A Ferroni does not let a lady support him," he said. "But if she were to ask him to have supper with her at her house, he could hardly refuse."

"You're invited. Get your hat," she said. "Mary and Lulu are getting quite expert preparing meals over an open fire, and they can do wonders with a Dutch oven. Soon, I hope, we will be allowed to return to our kitchen."

The two servants proved equal to the added diner, and served an excellent Irish stew, plus a lettuce salad from the garden they had planted in the rear of the Tarrant lot.

The two women had known more of Carlo than Marcy realized she had ever divulged, and were quite impressed by his rugged good looks, and his continental charm. Marcy introduced him as well to the two Fortune children, Ruby and Michael, who were still staying with her. It had been learned definitely that their mother and grandfather had died in the fire. Marcy had kept them, since they had no other relatives and no assets. She was fond of the pretty, budding Ruby and the stalwart young lad.

She noticed that the children seemed quite reserved and quiet during the meal, and wondered if it were the presence of Carlo. But she learned the real reason when dessert, a delicious cake, had been eaten. Ruby said, "Miss Marcy, could Mike and I have a talk with you in the parlor?"

"Of course," Marcy said. "Carlo, will you excuse me for a little while?"

He stood and bowed, and she went out with the children.

They sat with her on the divan and she put an arm about each of them. She said, "All right, kids, what's bothering you?"

"It's awfully hard to put into words, Miss Marcy," Ruby said. "But we need your advice."

"I'll give it my best lick," Marcy assured her.

"Well, with Mama gone, and Grandpa, we ain't—haven't got anyone. And we miss them something awful. Miss Marcy, do people love adopted kids like they do their own?" Ruby asked.

"Why, I'm sure they do. Sometimes more, because they have picked their children out, instead of just taking whatever God sent them. Who is talking adoption, Ruby?"

"It's—it's Mr. Dom and Rita. They want us to come with them and be their family, Mr. Dom says."

"Why, that's wonderful!" Marcy exclaimed. "Children, in all the world there aren't two people I love and respect and admire more than Dominic and Rita Renfrow."

"Well, me and Mike, we love them too. But we're not like little babies—I'm, well, pretty near a growed-up woman. Maybe we'd be in their way. Maybe they'd get so they didn't like us any more. We thought we'd ask you. You're about the smartest, most friendliest lady we ever met."

"Now, no flattery, kids. Listen, I'll have to talk with the Renfrows. I'm sure they have their minds made up, if they've already talked to you. And you need them, kids, you need their love and affection. Ruby, you're far from a growed-up woman. Maybe you could get a job as a cash-girl in the City of Paris, but what other dreams and ambitions do you have?"

"I'd like to be, well, a doctor," Ruby said shyly. "After I saw the way those doctors worked in that tent hospital in the Park, I made up my mind that's what I want to be, to help people. And I watched, Miss Marcy, and saw them operate, and all that blood, and I never got sick, not once."

"I did," Mike said solemnly. "I frowed up."

"Then we'll have Dom make an accountant out of you," Marcy said to the boy. She stood up. "Have I helped your problem?"

"You sure have," Ruby said. "I guess maybe we'd really made up our minds, for we do love Dom and Rita. They come to see us every day. Only we didn't want to take advantage of their kindness, and make them sorry they ever met us."

"They won't be, children," Marcy said. "You'll make them as proud as your real parents would have been, I'll guarantee it."

Feeling warmed by the Renfrows' acceptance of the waifs, Marcy returned to the dining room. "Minor crisis," she reported to Carlo. "All settled now." She cocked her head toward the sound of the Fortune children running up the stairs, laughing.

"Carlo, have you seen anything of the country about here?" she asked then.

"No, just burned buildings and fallen stones and dead men," he said. "I would like to. I think some I saw from the train resembles northern Italy."

"I'll show you some on Sunday you cannot match in all of Italy. We'll go on a picnic," she said.

"I am sorry, but I have not the funds to buy us the lunch and the wine. I cannot go," he said stubbornly.

She put her hands on her hips and scowled at him. "Honestly, Carlo Ferroni, trying to do something nice for you is like trying to pet a porcupine. You're going, and that's that."

"I do not know what is this porcupine, but you look such daggers, you speak so stern, my pride must crawl in a hole. So on Sunday we go on the picnic!"

She came to him, and he hugged her, and when her face lifted to his, he kissed her so passionately that her breath came quickly when he released her. She stepped back, though she kept hold of both his hands.

"And Carlo, we'll have a long talk," she said. "About you, and about me, and about the future. But for tonight, I am so full of the joy of just seeing you again, of feeling the warmth of your kisses, of the mere fact of knowing my Carlo is back, I cannot think of serious things. They'll have to wait for Sunday."

"Sunday it is, then," he said, and took out his watch. She saw that it was a dollar Ingersoll, not the gold hunting-case he had carried in Italy—which was gone to pay debts, she supposed.

"Time for Carlo to retire to his small room on Fillmore Street," he said. "Otherwise Tarrant Motors will not enjoy the full efficiency of the *soi-disant* Charles Smith But never forget one thing, dear Marcy! I love you and will forever."

"And you're my man, you stubborn Lombard," she told him.

CHAPTER XV

Though it was a summer Sunday morning, "the damnedest finest ruins" of downtown San Francisco were buzzing with activity. As she drove the Vinca down the newly-cleared Market Street, Marcy felt admiration for the determination and courage of the property owners who were beginning anew. Yet she felt a profound regret that in spite of this unparalleled opportunity, the sweep and scope, the imaginative beauty of the Burnham plan would never get beyond the blueprint stage.

Marcy and Signe Johansen, with Inez Colchester, William Denman and Chalmers Laughlin, had fought the good fight in the Committee of Fifty. But with the determined opposition of Quincy Yount, Abe Rust, and finally even Mayor Eugene Schmitz, they were forced to see only the few forlorn fragments of the Burnham plan becoming reality. A widened Market Street, some other thoroughfares straightened, and an expanded and relocated civic center proved the limit of the accomplishment of Marcy's group.

"So San Francisco is going ahead in a race to make all the same mistakes once again," she said to Carlo. At a cross street a gang was loading rubble on a motor truck marked "M-O-T Construction." She waved at the driver of the truck.

"One of ours," she told Carlo. "My father thought that in a very short time the motor truck would replace the draft horses everywhere. And I agree. So Tarrant's will follow his plan of pushing the sale of motor trucks. They need many improvements, of course. They must be bigger, have more power—"

"I have been thinking along those lines myself," Carlo said. "I have a plan. On our picnic I will tell you about it."

Marcy turned the car into the line of carriages, carts and drays at the ramp leading to the Sausalito ferry. Driving carefully so she wouldn't frighten the teams, Marcy tooled the Vinca aboard and set the brakes. In a few minutes, the ferry whistle hooted, water roiled white under the blunt end of the ship, and it moved out from shore and headed north. Marcy

and Carlo got out and leaned on the rail as Alcatraz Island dropped behind, and Fort Mason.

In the bright sunshine they had a clear view of the devastated area, and the terrible extent of destruction took Marcy's breath away. What had been a city was now broken fangs of stone, formless masses of iron and concrete, piles of broken brick. The streets were mere outlines, and along their squares and curves, the only greenery was the splash of new weeds springing up amidst the rubble.

"Like Pompeii," Carlo said in an awed voice. "Marcy, it hardly seems possible it will ever be a city again."

"But it will," she said with surety. "There is a spirit here, Carlo, that will not stay down. Why, they are already planning to hold a World's Fair here in a few years to celebrate the end of reconstruction."

"And when will that be?"

Marcy frowned, staring toward the steep slope of Telegraph Hill. She said, "Five years, seven—Carlo, not more than ten. I'd make a wager on that."

He put an arm about her shoulders, smiling at her. "You Americans do things with such determination, always in a big way. I think soon I become an American myself."

She looked at him, feeling her heart leap at the nearness, the virile good looks of this gentle man. He had aged in the past months, she thought, but it was not unbecoming. He had acquired a deeper personality, humility, perhaps. Whatever it was, she loved him for it. Beside him, the other men in her life seem shadowy; Carlo was the reality. *Carlo,* she said silently, *I will never let you go. Not ever.*

"You intend to apply for citizenship?" she asked. "Never to return to Italy?"

He laughed in delight. "Oh, I return, all right, but as a visitor, the rich American, famous inventor, high mogul of the turning wheels. Perhaps I donate a new stained-glass window for my church in Novara, in memory of my papa and my mama. I buy new range for my cousin Roberto's *ristorante,* and eat his pasta until I have had my fill. Then I will find Umberto and sail back with him to America where he can be foreman in my great new factory."

"My, what wonderful dreams we dream!" Marcy said with a touch of irony. "And where does Marceline Tarrant fit into this fantasy?"

"Aha! She is in the dream too, but I dare not tell her the part she will play, for fear *las fatas,* the fairies, whisk her

away from me. In due time, my dear sweet red-haired Marcy, Carlo will reveal all."

Before she could assimilate this, the ferry charged into the slip at Sausalito in a flurry of white water from its reversed propellers, and thumped solidly against the fender mats Carlo spun the crank of the Vinca, and the engine rumbled into life. Marcy followed a brewery dray laden with empty kegs up the ramp and turned down the street of the little town.

Beyond the town, Marcy turned the car west toward the ocean. "I'm taking you to a very special place, Carlo," she said. "The last time I picnicked here was on a golden day last autumn, and—" Her voice caught a little. "My little boy Tommy was with me. He loved it. I hope you will too."

His answer was a sympathetic squeeze of her arm, as if he knew mere words would be inadequate.

She drove along a narrow, steep track, with the great trees crowding in closer and closer. It was cool and quiet, the air fragrant with crisp, piny forest odors. The road ended in a cleared space, where Marcy pulled aside and stopped to permit a large carryall drawn by four horses to pass them on its return trip, the occupants waving enthusiastically at the motorists. When it was gone down the hill, Marcy drove the Vinca ahead fifty yards and stopped. She turned off the engine.

Standing beside the car, Carlo stretched and breathed deep. He looked up at the tops of the magnificent trees, then through an opening in the forest where a vista revealed the blue of the Pacific. He said, "Never have I seen a more lovely, peaceful place. What is it called, Marcy?"

"Muir Woods," she told him. "It will soon be preserved forever as a memorial to John Muir, one of our famous naturalists. He lives to the north of here, quite old now, but still traveling the world, writing his books about nature. Some day I'll take you into the mountains, to Yosemite and Sequoia, whose beauty was almost single-handedly saved from destruction by John Muir."

With Carlo following her, carrying the picnic basket, Marcy went down a forest path toward the ocean. At first the silence among the ferns in the cool woods seemed almost tangible. Then as her ear became accustomed, Marcy recognized a medley of small sounds, the rasp of a cicada, a whir of bird's wings, a sweet distant lark song. Always there was a sighing, a susurrus of the gentle breeze among the branches of the tall trees.

Sunlight streamed through openings in the boughs, crossing the path in distinct rays, probing the dusk of the forest floor,

but never quite touching hollows shaded by tree and brush and fern. The two people walked almost silently along the trail, their steps muffled by the soft duff, thereby surprising a plumy-tailed squirrel, which cursed noisily at them, and scampered up a tree as Marcy and Carlo laughed at him.

As they came out into an open space above the ocean, Carlo said, "This place—it's like a cathedral, Marcy."

"Almost exactly the words John Muir used to describe it," Marcy said. "And like a church, it will be preserved for everyone to enjoy."

She led the way downward through high brush. When it opened up in a secluded clearing, she said, "Here we are. Isn't this marvelous, Carlo?"

He put down the picnic basket. His arm about her shoulders, he looked toward the west, where today the ocean was living up to its name. The blue water went away and away until it was lost in the juncture between curved sky and curved earth. Below the hill the slow rollers broke in white ribbons against the shore in a froth of foam, and receded again.

"If we walked straight ahead, we would in due time arrive in Japan," Marcy said.

"Though we would be very wet when we got there," he said, laughing. He picked up a rock and scaled it out into the water.

"Sometimes one can see whales from here, and sea lions. And there are always the water birds. Are you hungry, Carlo?"

"Not yet, but very soon, I think. But for now, let us talk."

"Of dreams? Of plans? Of you and me?"

"Exactly." He seated himself comfortably on a ledge, and pulled her down beside him, holding her hand in his callused one. "On such a beautiful day, it is hard to be practical," he said. "It would be easier and more fun just to drift and let the cares of the world slide behind, as the white bubbles of the surf break and are gone. But man and woman, being what they are, are never content with that, but must test fate in their own ways."

She leaned against him, and smoothed down the tweed of the scandalously short walking skirt she had donned that morning. It came hardly six inches below the knee. Secretly, Marcy liked the style, for she had handsome legs and knew it.

"I love to hear you talk like that, so full of deep philosophy," she said, chuckling.

"I have had much time to think, dear one," he said. "Months and months of time." He laughed, without amuse-

ment, a sardonic note. "Life is so strange, Marcy. That last day in Novara, when we parted in tears. You left because you must return to America, to your business, your father, your sweet small boy. I stayed because I could not leave my factory, my people, my estates. And now, not one year later, the world of ours has shuddered, as it did in San Francisco that April day Of your reasons, you have only your business left. Of mine, I have none, except maybe my pride, and that is badly bent. My people in Novara have turned to more generous *padrones*. The Costains have the factory. And I am here in America The choices, the options, we thought we had that day in Novara, gone, all of them, gone."

"The world has turned upside down," Marcy murmured.

"It has indeed." He shrugged expressively. "What do we do now, dear one?"

"With our old options destroyed, we must find new ones, new choices, new directions," Marcy said firmly. "Carlo, a few weeks ago, I thought my world was ruined forever. But now I am beginning to live again. I have lost much, but I have my health, I have friends, I have a business that is prospering, and I'm sure I know how to keep it prosperous. It is prosperous enough, dear Carlo, to give a man who is broke and in debt a foothold to climb over obstacles and start anew."

He shook his head. "Thank you, Marcy, but that is not for me."

"The Ferroni pride again?" she asked resignedly.

"Partly. But mainly because it would not work. I would be an interloper. All your people, Dominic and Cal Plumb and the rest, they have been with you and your father from the beginning. They are proud of their part in building the business. If I came in, I would break up the team; there would be resentment, and anger, and jealousy. Moreover, it is *your* business, and you are a woman of strong will. Since I am a man of strong will, we would grow to resent each other, then there would be bitterness, and finally an explosion. I would be a poor business partner, Marcy." Then his hand tightened on hers. "But as a husband, I think I could be a great success."

She cried joyously, "Oh, Carlo, we shall be married, then? You are proposing to me? Don't answer that! I accept. How soon will it be?"

He looked at her, his dark eyes glowing, then he stared out over the limitless blue of the ocean. "Not soon, dear one," he said slowly. "Not only will I not come to you as a beggar, a nobody, a failure, but I have lost confidence in myself. I

think that will come back. Like you, I think I am beginning to live again. But like a child, I must learn to walk again before I can run. When I have proven myself, then—"

"The light dawns. Your plan—you have found a way to prove yourself? How, Carlo?"

"For a long time, several years, I have had in my brain this idea for a new gasoline engine. I see it very plain, so very smooth, so powerful, so efficient. But my problems in Novara are so pressing, I never have time to work on it. Now in one year, two, when I have money enough to start, I will begin working on a prototype. Thank God I have nearly cleared all my debts in Italy. Still, it will take money, and time."

"But Carlo, we'd have to wait forever!" Marcy cried.

He shrugged again. "I must do it on my terms."

Marcy stared at him, her lips taut. She counted to ten, and to ten again, before she spoke. Her voice was calm when she said, "Tell me about it."

His arm about her shoulders, his voice gained enthusiasm as he talked, his free hand making eloquent gestures. "My engine will be what I call a vee-eight. Two banks of four cylinders at an angle. Two exhaust manifolds—" As he went on, Marcy found with her engineering training she had no trouble in following his thought. A radical concept, she realized, but if he could make it work, he would add a new dimension to the automotive industry. His enthusiasm began to communicate itself to her.

When he finished, he looked at her shyly, like a small boy asking for a pat on the head. She smiled and gave him her accolade.

"Carlo, it's a marvelous idea, and it will work!" she said. "If you can turn it into a commercial power plant, the world will beat a path to your door."

"In my head I see it all, and it will work, I know it," he said. He stood up and took a couple turns across the little clearing. Coming back, he dropped down beside her. "I know I can turn a dream and some sketches into a real machine of steel and brass and rubber. Yet how? I need castings and wire and pistons and hoses and a hundred other things, all special, all expensive. I must have the use of drill presses and lathes and shapers, and a place to work. You see how impossible it is, Marcy."

She was silent for a long time, as an idea of her own built in her mind. Then she said, "Carlo, the world needs this engine of yours. You must not wait a year, a month, even a

week. Listen to me. M-O-T Construction has a big shop in South San Francisco. They have all the big machine tools you need. They are not only business associates of mine, but friends. If I ask, they'll set aside a corner of their shop for your exclusive use. And through their purchasing agent, or Tarrant Motors', we can get your materials at wholesale. Why, out there you can work day and night, if you wish, and nobody will disturb you."

"What a beautiful thought, Marcy. But there's no money."

"Oh, pouf!" Marcy exclaimed. "It isn't going to cost all that much. We'll set up a drawing account on Tarrant Motors to cover the engine work as well as your own expenses. We've got a little second-hand Olds you can have to run around in. Come, Carlo, I'm pleading with you. For once swallow that damned stiff-necked pride of yours and say yes."

He stared at her, his eyes shining. "I should say 'Get thee behind me, red-haired devil!' but I am not a complete fool. Marcy, my dearest girl, I accept."

She flung herself upon him and hugged him, and kissed him ardently. Then she drew away, and with immense practicality, she said, "That's settled, then. Darling, I'm hungry. Let's eat."

In the soft air they dined with the sauce of healthy appetites on the sumptuous lunch Mary Tupper had prepared for Marcy. It proved delectable, from fried chicken to apple pie, with all the side dishes one could want. The meal was accompanied by a fine Cabernet Sauvignon from the dry golden hills of Sonoma.

Afterward, replete, Marcy and Carlo stretched supine in dappled shade, half asleep, each thinking of the future. The gentle breeze, the distant drum of the surf, the rustle of leaves and the hiss of the dry grass lulled the senses. Marcy was sensuously joyful at the nearness of Carlo's strong body.

Then from the edge of sleep a moaning tugged at her, and her being was flooded with a horror, a menace, a threat so terrible that she screamed, and sat up straight, wide-eyed, her body taut. Only then did she realize that she had been the person who moaned.

Carlo's arms went around her. "Marcy! Marcy darling! What's the matter?"

She whispered, "A nightmare." She buried her face in the softness of his flannel shirt, as he rocked her, holding her tight.

When her trembling stopped and she was calm again, she wiped her tear-wet eyes and looked up at him. "I thought it

was gone, but it came back. I saw the flames mounting high and swooping at me, and out of the flames came that great balk of timber, hanging there, turning, coming down at last to the sidewalk, and there crushing—" She clung to him again, comforted by the strength of his strong arms enfolding her.

"It's all right, darling," he soothed. "It's over. I'll never let anything like that happen to you again."

Something stirred in her then, his nearness, his strength, his gentleness made her want him. For she knew she loved this man, loved him beyond all loving. The memory of that delirious week in Italy flooded over her. She lifted her face to his. "Carlo," she whispered. "Love me, please. I want you."

He kissed her, long and lingeringly. But when he released her, he made no move to take the first steps to satisfy her, to possess her. *Is there no urgency in him as there is in me?* she thought. She pressed close to him, breasts to chest.

Gently, with great reluctance, his hands moved her away from him. "Marcy, I'm no saint," he said softly. "Please don't do this to me."

"But Carlo, I want you, I need you," she said desperately. "It's been so long since Como, since Padua. You must know the aching in me that must be served."

"I remember Como," he said, smiling faintly. "I don't remember much about Padua, except the rain, so the bed was warm and pleasant, and we made good use of it."

"Why not, then, make as good use of the sands of California?" she demanded.

"Marcy, you're a devil, a beautiful, red-headed devil, and I love you to distraction. But I can't do this."

Anger leaped within her. She was humiliating herself before this man whom she loved, and he was rejecting her. "Why not, Carlo? Tell me, why not?"

"Because I love you, dear one. Let's call it the damnable pride of the Ferronis. Please, Marcy. In Italy I was a success, a man of great affairs, who could have a love idyll with the lovely American as an equal. Now that love is as powerful, as eternal as it was then, but I am a humble mechanic, a nobody. I want to marry you, Marcy darling, and I will. But until I can meet you on equal terms, I will not prey on your pity, your emotions. It would not be fair to you, or to me."

"Your reasoning evades me, sir," she said. "I feel that I am being cheated of something I would give freely, and loyally, as a warm and loving woman could." Then her sense of humor came to her rescue. The absurdity of the situation

became apparent. She laughed ruefully. "All right, Sir Galahad. You have spurned my body and rejected my passion. Remain celibate, then, but remember, I'll get you yet."

She stood up, brushing the sand and twigs from her tweed skirt. He stood up, too, and took her in his arms. Though the urgency was still there, she gave him a wisp of a smile, and kissed him firmly but gently.

"I am forgiven, then?" he asked. "Marcy, you do understand?"

She shook her head. "I'm not sure I'll ever understand you men. You move by logic, where a woman moves on instinct. She knows when to let her emotions rule her; when she wants her way, she goes straight for it, and heaven help anyone who gets in her way. Don't forget that, my very dear Carlo. I'll save myself for you, and you alone. But a word of warning—don't make me wait too long."

"Marcy, I love you, and I'll never let you down," he said, and kissed her.

CHAPTER XVI

On a gloomy autumn day, Marcy drove her Vinca through the gate of Marshall-Osweiler-Tarrant's equipment yard in South San Francisco, and parked near the office entrance. As she got out of the car, Mal Marshall came down the steps, looking hard-bitten and competent in khaki shirt, whipcord breeches, and high laced boots. He struggled into a stiff yellow slicker.

"Marcy, pal, so darned good to see you," he said. "How are things going?"

"Quite well, actually. But Mal, what happened to M-O-T on the Galion Slip bid?" she asked.

He scowled darkly. "Marcy, your dad wouldn't have done it, and I refused to do it either—grease the palms of Quincy Yount and Abe Rust and God knows how many other fat cats on the take. Oz and I decided we just wouldn't do business that way, even if we starved. So the job went to Coakley Brothers."

Impulsively, Marcy shook Marshall's hand. "Good for you. And may the Coakleys have the joy of their bargain. What does it say in Ecclesiastes? 'He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith.' You won't regret your decision."

He grinned. "Funny thing. Not being tied up with the Galion job, we bid on that causeway down in Monterey County—and got it! Something over a half-million. How's that?"

"Who says honesty isn't rewarded? Mal, is Carlo in the shop? I haven't seen him for days, and I worry about him."

"He's there, he's always there. In his lab, as he calls it. He worries me, too, His car is already there when the crew comes to work, and nights I come in late from the Peninsula I see his light still on. He works as if some devil was driving him."

"It is. After the crash in Italy when he lost everything, he feels he has to prove himself again to the world, and to me."

Smiling, Marshall asked, "You're right fond of that handsome Italian, aren't you, Marcy?"

"More than that, Mal. I intend, God willing, to marry him, just as soon as I can pin him down," she said frankly.

"In my opinion, you could do a hell of a lot worse," Marshall said. "Everybody likes the man, and some of the things he is doing—well, they take more than a touch of genius. He's got me sold on that engine of his, so much that I keep thinking of new applications for compact power like that. Brute power for shovels and cranes, and big trucks. The Ferroni engine could revolutionize the construction industry, in my opinion."

"Well, I'm pulling for him too, Mal," Marcy said.

Head lowered against the rain, she crossed the yard and entered the machine shop. It smelled of solvent and glue and wood shavings, of burnt metal and cutting oil. She saw Carlo in dark goggles leaning over a piece of steel plate he was shaping with a hissing oxyacetylene cutting torch. She stood quietly, watching the shower of flaming sparks leap from the torch tip. As the waste piece dropped to the floor with a clang, Carlo shut off the torch. Pushing his goggles up on his forehead, he turned. Seeing her for the first time, he smiled.

"Why, hello, pretty lady," he said. He stripped off his gauntlets, wiped his hand on the leg of his coveralls, and clasped her hand. "It brightens the day to see you."

"It is gloomy, isn't it? But since the mountain wouldn't come to Mahomet—" She smiled, warming to the touch of his hand. Then she frowned, noting the honed-down planes of his face, the hollows under his eyes. *He's too darned thin,* she thought.

"Carlo, you aren't eating properly," she said severely. "You're trying to live on bologna sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs. Now tonight you're coming to have dinner with me. I'm having Cal and Mrs. Plumb and the Renfrows. Afterwards you men can talk shop to your heart's content."

He stared at the clumsy block of metal on the work stand. Marcy could see him searching for excuses. Then he sighed. "For anyone but you, dear Marcy, I would plead important matters. But you know me too well, eh? Is this some special occasion?"

"No, it's just because I've missed you, you beast!" she said. She stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "Besides, you promised to marry me when the Ferroni Vee-Eight comes to life. When will I need my wedding dress?"

"I'm afraid there is no need for your couturier to hurry. But Marcy, I am making progress. I feel encouraged."

"I want a full report tonight," she said. "Now I must go. I have a prospect in Palo Alto who is loaded with money, and says only the boss of Tarrant Motors can sell him a Rolls-Royce."

"When the car comes in, I must see it. The motor magazines are praising it to the skies."

"Charles Rolls writes there have been production delays, and we will not have our first four cars until after the end of February, at the least. So I must sell my wealthy maker of switch stands and fishplates by the Rolls brochures and the clever tongue of Marceline Tarrant. Why, I'll say the prestige of being near the top of the waiting list is greater than *driving* most cars. So I'll come away with his nice fat check for a third of the cost in my pocket."

"You could charm a bird from a bush and a squirrel from a tree, dear red-haired woman," he said, walking with her to the door.

"It will take some charming. You know what Charles Rolls wants for chassis and coachwork on his big limousine, the one he calls the Silver Ghost?"

"A good many pounds, I'm sure. How much?"

"Twenty-two hundred pounds, plus transportation from England to point of delivery."

Carlo whistled softly. "No wonder you hunt for rich customers. It must be a great car."

"It is, I'm sure. But I wish we were still selling Ferronis, the real ones, that is." She gave him a quick kiss and turned to leave.

"Not likely, *cara mia*. But you may see much of the Ferroni engine," he said. As she went down the steps to her car she heard once more the pop and hiss of the cutting torch.

When Marcy's guests arrived in the chill November evening, wood fires burned bright and cheerful in each marble fireplace of parlor, sitting room, and dining room. Greeting the Renfrows, Marcy felt a rising excitement, for though she had observed no formal period of mourning, she had not until now been in the mood to entertain. It seemed to her now that she should have asked these dear friends in sooner, though Carlo was a visitor as often as she could dragoon him into coming.

When Mary Tupper had taken the wraps of the Renfrows, Marcy led them into the parlor, where Dom warmed his hands gratefully in front of the blazing fire. Rita did not need the fire; she was warmed by some inner excitement.

"Marcy, we did it!" she exclaimed, her eyes shining. "It's gone through! The judge signed the papers today."

"Oh, how wonderful!" Marcy said, and hugged her friend. "So you and Dom are the parents of a fifteen-year-old girl and a ten-year-old boy. Are Ruby and Michael pleased?"

"Thrilled to death, just as we are. Marcy, it was a sad day when Dom and I learned we could not have any more children of our own. But now we're so happy with our new family, it's like—like a miracle."

"And two finer, more intelligent children than the Fortune kids would be hard to find," Marcy said. "I got to know them so well while they lived here. We all loved them."

"I think they'll make us proud," Dom Renfrow said, his arm around his wife's shoulders. "And just think, Marcy, two fine children, yet never a diaper to change, or ever a spit-up to wipe, no teething wails in the middle of the night."

"Just you wait, Dom, until Ruby discovers boys, and Mike discovers girls," Marcy said, laughing.

Cal Plumb and his wife seemed a bit uncomfortable at first in the elegance of the Tarrant home, but the rough-and-ready expert and his petite gray-haired wife were soon put at their ease. Beulah Danaher drove up next, proudly in her own little car, and a few minutes later Carlo arrived.

Carlo was elegant in a freshly pressed suit of dark serge, some three years out of fashion, relieved by a brightly striped cravat gracing a high-winged collar. Only his hands failed to fit the elegance of a continental gentleman, scarred and callused, the fingernails broken, stained with chemicals even the hardest scrubbing could not remove. Marcy took him into the parlor, proud of his good looks, delighted by the warm touch of his hand.

Marcy's girls had outdone themselves with dinner. A crab cocktail, a chicken bisque, followed by a delicate fillet of sole in cream sauce. The entree was a roast of beef, juicy, tinged with pink, with green beans and almonds, and baked potatoes. The meal was accompanied by a fine grenache rosé from the Chevalier's Golden Valley Winery at Napa.

At this season the dessert was, of course, pumpkin pie, rich and golden, piled high with whipped cream. Then the company adjourned to the parlor, for chartreuse or brandy.

Glass in hand, Dom Renfrow stood with an elbow on the mantel. He looked thoughtful, Marcy decided, and waited. He said at last, "Marcy, have you heard that Paul Costain is back in town?"

Startled, Marcy lifted her head. Could Paul's name still

make her heart race faster, or was it the surprise of Dom's statement?

"I didn't think Paul would appear in San Francisco," she said slowly, "after the way Assurance Costain has treated their policy-holders."

"What is that?" Carlo asked, frowning. "I had not heard of this. The Costains are in trouble?"

Dom Renfrow answered him. "It's a long story, Carlo. You see, from earlier fires San Francisco was fire-conscious, so was heavily insured. Since the city had a world-renowned fire department, the premiums seemed like easy money, especially to firms in Europe. So Rhine and Moselle had five million outstanding, so did Hamburg-Bremen. Assurance Costain, with Costain Brothers as their local agent, had about ten million outstanding."

"A hundred and eight companies involved in all," Marcy said. "And they were suddenly faced with the largest loss in history, something over half a billion dollars."

"The repercussions are still rocking the financial world," Dom went on. "Two German and one Austrian firm have defaulted completely. Of course they will be sued, but that will take forever to get any payment out of them. Costain *Frères*, the parent company of Assurance Costain, denied responsibility, which meant that Assurance Costain would go bankrupt. Under tremendous pressure from all sides, Costain *Frères* has decided to back Assurance Costain, but they want to discount their liability to fifty cents on the dollar. Even that will put Costain Brothers in the soup, for their French brethren will hold them to the limit of responsibility."

"So Paul is here to straighten things out?" Marcy asked.

"I would guess so. His father, Norbert Costain, had a stroke and is out of the picture. The gossip along Montgomery Street is that the squeeze is on from Paris, and the local Costains are scrambling hectically to pony up their share of the losses, and stay out of bankruptcy court," Dom said.

"Such misfortune could light on nobody more deserving than a Costain," Carlo said darkly. "Maybe these pirates, French and American alike, are finally collecting what is coming to them. Let them know how it feels to be between the jaws of the nutcracker."

"I hope Lord Wolverton and your cousin Kitti are out from under their Costain *Frères* loans," Marcy said.

"I think they have no problem," Carlo said. "I had a long letter from Kitti, and the parts business has proven so

profitable, Luton Machine is already able to pay off most of the loans. Denis was right in his prediction."

"If they could do that in a year and a half, making car parts must be more profitable than building a whole machine," Marcy commented.

"Perhaps furnishing the engines will prove just as lucrative," Dom said. "How about it, Count?"

"When my engine is a success, I will be satisfied to let someone else build the car around it," Carlo told him. "I learned my lesson. If I provide the horse, I don't care who builds the carriage."

As Marcy's guests were leaving, Dom Renfrow took Marcy aside. "Marce, I brought that up about Paul Costain on purpose. Del told me today that Costain has been talking to him about buying one of the first Rolls. He wants it on a long-term note. So if we sell him the car, and he gives us a note, it's possible that Costain Brothers might go belly-up and leave us holding the sack for fifteen, twenty thousand dollars."

Marcy frowned. *There's still a trace of sentiment there,* she thought. Moreover, the Costains were old-line San Francisco businesspeople. Yet she had to protect Tarrant Motors. She said, "Dom, pass the word to Del not to sell anything, not to promise anything to Costain Brothers or to Paul Costain, without clearing it with me. Since we won't have the cars for several months, we don't have to make a decision now."

"I'll tell Del," Dom promised. "Marce, weren't you—well, rather sweet on Paul Costain at one time?"

"Dom, you're stepping out of line," she said curtly.

The treasurer of Tarrant Motors looked sheepish. "Sorry, Marce. No offense intended."

"You're forgiven. Remember that I was also 'rather sweet' on a bashful young man named Dominic Renfrow, once upon a time." She touched his cheek with gentle fingers.

He drew a deep breath, happy to be let off the hook for his indiscretion. "I've never forgotten that," he said sincerely. "You know, Rita knows the whole story, and she approves. She thinks you are the greatest."

"I love her too. And you, Dom, don't ever change toward me. For in my own way, I'll always love you, too." She helped him on with his coat. "Run along now. Drive carefully. And good luck with your new family; they're grand kids. Bring them to see me often."

Marcy heard no more of Paul Costain in the following weeks. Beyond the initial contact, Del Pellegrini had heard no more from Paul. Nor did her path cross his, for which she was thankful. She did not share Carlo's vindictiveness toward the Costains, nor in fairness to Carlo, his powerful reasons.

Christmas this year of 1906 came almost unheralded to San Francisco. The great stores were gone, though they were operating from temporary quarters along Fillmore and Van Ness. The hotels and ballrooms were gutted shells. Money was tight, and far beyond San Francisco the nation was suffering from financial problems. It was hardly a time for rejoicing.

Marcy had even more reason to dread the coming of Christmas. Last year her father had been jovial as Santa Claus for an ecstatic Tommy, who wanted to know "how Santa got down the chimbley without getting his pants burnded."

But among the Laughlins and Tarrants, Christmas had always been a time for family. So Marcy gritted her teeth, and bought a fir tree, and invited everyone for Christmas dinner—the Chalmers Laughlins, and Stanley Holloman and Patsy, and her aunt Dora and the Chevalier. And of course Carlo. *One of those rare glimpses I get of the heart of my heart,* she thought. *My rival has lungs of steel and limbs of brass. Oh, Carlo, Carlo, why do you work so hard? You need a real live girl, just so long as it is me.*

There were moments that Christmas Day when memories came flooding back on Marcy, and she had to struggle to keep back tears. Yet the day was festive enough, the companionship, the noble Christmas dinner, the opening of presents from under the gaily decorated tree. And at the end, a surprise that turned the day around for Marcy.

When all the presents were opened, and the parlor was a maelstrom of pretty ribbons and discarded paper, Carlo took from his vest pocket a small square package and gave it to Marcy. With trembling fingers she opened it. It was a ring, hand-chased in gold, set with a baguette sapphire as blue as the waters of Lake Como. As she stared at it, entranced, he took the ring from her and slipped it on the third finger of her left hand. Bowing low, he kissed her hand and whispered, "Marceline Tarrant, will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

"I will," she said, and kissed him, before the delighted

eyes of the company. Then, dimpling, she said "But Carlo, first you must be divorced from the Ferroni Vee-Eight. How you found time to make this ring with your own hands I do not know, but it is beautiful. I love it—and you."

Claribel Laughlin, with her usual tact, said, "But Count Ferroni, won't there be complications, since you are not an American citizen?"

Carlo smiled at her, unperturbed. "The fact is, signora, already I have taken out those first papers for citizenship in this so great country of ours. But not Count Ferroni, please. Here there are no counts, nor barons or lords or princes. Kindly say only 'Mr. Ferroni' or better yet, just 'Carlo, old kid, how does everything go?' "

"Yet there is an aristocracy of sorts here, Carlo," Cham Laughlin said. "Not to be bragged about, for it is an aristocracy of money. Money brings power, and power breeds many things, often corruption. I've learned a lot about human nature in my service on the Committee of Fifty. Men I looked up to once I now dislike. Men I scoffed at have turned out to be of finest caliber. God forgive me, I was as arrogant a Brahmin as the worst of them, I'm afraid. I think I've changed."

"People are people, the world over, Mr. Laughlin," Carlo said. "There are more good men, I think, than bad ones. Think of how all kinds of people have joined together to help their stricken city, lying prostrate like a wounded dinosaur, but now in only eight months becoming reborn before our eyes. Events in my own life made me bitter about man and his inhumanity. But now new friends, a friendly city, have renewed that faith."

He stood up then. "I take off my tall silk hat and salute you in admiration," he said, and, doffing an imaginary hat, he bowed in turn to each of the half-circle of guests around the Christmas tree.

Laughing, Marcy said, "But Carlo, you don't even own a top hat."

"I do not," Carlo said gravely. "But soon I will buy one, and store it reverently in the closet at my workshop. On the day the Ferroni-Tarrant engine first roars into life, I will put on my silk hat, my white gloves, pick up my gold-headed cane, and escort Miss Marceline Tarrant to the altar."

Marcy took his arm, her eyes shining. "You heard him, all of you. So Carlo, you can't back out now. I'll start making plans. Patsy and Aunt Dora, you will be my attendants. Aunt Claribel, you will be my matron of honor. Uncle Cham, you

will give me away. Robert Duplessis, you will be in full charge of the reception."

"And what about me?" Stanley Holloman asked.

"Why, Stanley, you will dry the tears of the pretty weeping girls, and soothe the crying babies," Marcy said.

"The date, though, Marceline. When?" Claribel asked, with a touch of malice.

Carlo answered her. "Before the trees turn gold next autumn, signora. We will ring the church bells loudly to let you know when that glad day arrives."

Later, the Laughlins said their farewells, and Cham and Claribel, with Stanley Holloman, went down to their car. Patsy lagged behind. Carlo was chatting with the Chevalier and Dora in the parlor, so Patsy took Marcy's arm, and touching a finger to her lips, led Marcy into the library.

"Marcy, I had to have a personal word with you," she said. "Without the others there, I mean. I hope you don't think I've been cold and unfeeling, but—well, everything was so upset, and the new baby—oh dear, what I want to say is I know how hard it must be this first Christmas without—without Tommy. If I only had your courage, but I'm a coward of cowards."

"It's all right, Pat. Don't feel badly."

"But I do. You can't know, I can't tell you, how my heart ached for you when I heard of the deaths of Uncle Thomas and the boy—our boy. I did do something, though, to try to tell you I loved him, no matter what I said. And I love you, dear Marcy. How could I have acted as I did? I was a selfish, mean coward, that's why. I should have been stripped naked and lashed until the blood came, for what I did to my child. When he died, Marcy, I died a little, too. And now I feel guilty, because Stanley and I have our beautiful little son, and he's alive, and healthy, and a joy to us."

Marcy took her handkerchief and wiped the tears from her cousin's eyes. "There, there, Pat, it's over and done with. I'm grateful that Tommy was my boy for four years, and I will have the memory of him forever. Love your son, Pat, as I loved Tommy."

"I will, Marce," Patsy said, sniffing. She reached behind a chair and brought out a large package which she had evidently hidden there when she first came. "I failed him, Marce, and he was your little boy, forever and forever. So I did this for you. I want you to have it."

Marcy unwrapped the square package, revealing an oil painting. She let the light play on it, and saw it was a

portrait of little Tommy. Patsy had painted him seated on the floor, playing with a toy car, looking up with that winsome smile that was part of her heart. The lighting made a halo about his dark hair.

"Oh, God!" Marcy breathed. She put the painting down and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, Marce, I'm so sorry. I thought—" Patsy cried. "I'll take it home again. I didn't think it would—"

Marcy dabbed at her tear-wet cheeks. "You'll do nothing of the kind, Pat dear. It's perfectly marvelous, it's a lovely thing, and it will hang forever over the mantel. You've caught the very essence of my small boy's soul. You're a true artist, Pat. How did you do it?"

In evident relief, Patsy said, "I'd watch him every time I visited you. And your girls had some snapshots they lent me. Thank God you like it, Marce, and I hope the memories aren't too painful. It was a labor of love, something I had to do."

"You're right about the memories, but I've gotten so I can bear them. Now run along, your folks are waiting. I'll be out to see young Thomas Stanley Holloman one day soon."

"Oh, please do, Marce! He's so handsome, so blond and cuddly and smart!—" With a flash of smile Patsy ran down the steps to the waiting car.

A week later Marcy and Carlo, arm in arm, watched 1906, the Year of the Great Fire, vanish thankfully into oblivion. From the stoop of the Tarrant house, they listened to the guns and sirens and whistles welcome 1907. With a shiver Marcy realized that the uproar was weaker, the bells more solemn this time. The firecrackers and cacophony of Chinatown were missing, many of the whistles of the big factories were forever silenced.

She gathered her shawl about her shoulders, and said, "Carlo, may this be a good year for you and for me. Come, let's go in. I'm shivering from a chill wind and old memories."

Before the dying embers in the fireplace, his arm about her shoulders, she told him something of that first Nautilus Ball at the turn of the century, of the ostentatious display of wealth, the glitter of jewels. The Nautilus Club was only a legend now, for the handsome building had been destroyed by the fire, and the directors had sold the site, using the proceeds to buy a tract of land down the Peninsula for a new Nautilus Golf & Country Club.

"Cleopatra Costain, the mother of Paul, was always the big wheel at the Nautilus Ball," Marcy told Carlo. "Dear one, you should have seen her that night, dripping with diamonds, literally, and with a stomacher of diamonds like the breastplate of an amazon. A sight one could never forget."

"The Costain family fortunes have declined badly," Carlo said. "Robert Duplessis told me that both the French and the American branch have been hit hard. That fire loss was most damaging, both to fortunes and reputations. Of course, by our humble standards the Costains are still wealthy. As the Chevalier put it, with a wink at me, 'The Costains are down to their last yacht.'"

"I wonder how it goes with *Maman*," Marcy said.

"Ah, that Mme. Demaret! I think that woman is as indestructible as a statue of steel. She will go on like a great locomotive, indomitable, through every disaster, through wars and rumors of wars." She felt a shudder pass along his arm. "She will go on taking advantage of every holocaust, without mercy, without human feeling. I dread that woman, Marcy."

"I'm not so sure she will survive this one, Carlo. Without Jacques, without Paul—" Marcy shook her head.

At that moment Mary and Lulu came in, soberly, their night on the town evidently sedate and unexciting. Not like the New Years of old at their Devonshire Club, gone to glory in flame and dynamite last April. Marcy sent Mary to bring Logan Cresap, the old chauffeur, from his room. Ceremoniously, Lulu wiped the dust from the bottle of old Golden Valley brandy the Chevalier had sent down. She pulled the cork and poured the amber liquid into the Baccarat balloon snifters Thomas Tarrant had loved.

Marcy raised her glass, after warming it between her palms. "May 1907 bring us health, wisdom, and love," she said.

They savored the lovely bouquet of the old brandy, and drank the toast. Logan Cresap lifted his glass again. "And in this year may we not see the walls of Jericho come tumbling down."

"Amen to that!" they chorused, and drank deep.

CHAPTER XVII

Marcy, walking from her home to the Tarrant Building, ducked her head against the cold March rain, her umbrella little protection against the swirling icy drops. The sky was gray with low-hanging clouds, and wisps of fog like formless ghosts drifted along Van Ness Avenue, warping the outlines of the great stone shell of the gutted Claus Spreckels house, the house that could not burn, but did. Eastward, Marcy could see through a break in the cloud cover the peak of Nob Hill, and the skeleton forms of cranes and scaffolding where new buildings were going up. The Committee of Fifty had managed to put through severe rules for safe construction in the city, to prevent the destruction of another holocaust.

She entered the side door, waved at the shop crew, and in her own office, hung her dripping coat on the rack. She shook the drops from her sou'wester and hung it up, and struggled out of her galoshes. She was wearing a skirt of broadcloth, in the short style now universally accepted for inclement weather, even by the most Victorian of the city's fashion arbiters.

Beulah had opened and sorted the mail, and placed the more important items on Marcy's desk. Marcy made quick notations on each letter to guide Beulah in the reply she would type. Just as she finished she looked up to see Dom Renfrow and Cal Plumb enter.

"Good news, Marcy," Dom said. "I just got the manifest on our Rolls-Royce shipment at last. Four cars, a standard side entrance, a two-seater with hood and screen, a Pullman limousine, and a low-seat touring car. All with Barker coachwork."

"And all equipped with Dunlop tires, or 't-y-r-e-s' as the English spell it," Cal Plumb said. "I ain't so sure I like 'em as well as the Michelins we use on the Saxon-Benz."

"Charles Rolls claims the Dunlops are as good or better, and he's tested them hard," Marcy said. "We'll see how they stand up to our San Francisco hills."

Dom was frowning. "Cham's bank will accept the paper,

Marcy, but it's a fat chunk of money, even after the third payment in advance. With the Olds units, it puts our loan total pretty close to the limit. We want to have working capital to handle the deal with Henry Ford when his production comes on line."

"You worry too much, Dom," Marcy said, smiling. "Have Cham draw a draft against our account for the balance we owe Rolls. The four cars are all pre-sold, and we'll have the money in the bank by the time the Bank of London puts the draft in for collection." She handed him the list of four names.

"They're all solid enough," he admitted, handing it back. "But let's not gamble too much, Marcy. I don't like the look of the national situation. Copper prices are dropping badly, and some of the Eastern banks are not as sound as they should be. If they went—well, it might be almost as bad as the Northern Pacific Corner in 1901, and you know what that did."

"Even if we had another panic, these men are so rich they would ignore it," Marcy said, tapping the list. "So go ahead with the Rolls payment. But you're right, Dom, we'll take a good look for financial indicators, and be ready to pull in our horns if it looks like things are going to pot."

"Darned right. If we're too deeply committed, and call money goes to a hundred and twenty-five percent, as it could, we'd be in the soup. I'm glad we're on a sound basis, and not depending on a fire insurance payment to keep us solvent."

"There's more trouble on those, Dom?"

"Costain Brothers is offering the claimants of Assurance Costain fifty cents on the dollar, I hear."

Marcy whistled softly. "That's not likely to be accepted, I'm afraid. If it indicates a pattern, San Francisco's recovery will slow down to a walk."

"That it will," Dom said grimly.

Later in the morning Del Pellegrini, Tarrant's sales manager, came into Marcy's office, frowning. "Marcy, something has come up that I don't like," he said. "Olaf Johansen, of the Blue Star Line, is high on our Rolls-Royce list."

"He is. In fact, he will get one of the four units we expect to arrive soon."

"Yeah, the R.R. runabout. Well, he says he has relinquished his priority on the car to Paul Costain. You know, the banker, of Costain Brothers. He says Costain will take delivery."

"Tarrant's doesn't do business that way, Del," Marcy said.

"I told him exactly that. But Johansen is insisting. He sounded—well, evasive, worried, I thought."

"How did you leave it?"

"Told him I'd have to talk to you, but I doubted if you'd go for it. Costain's too far down the list, even if he had ponied up the advance payment, which he hasn't."

"You handled it perfectly, Del. Now call Johansen back and—no, wait, I think I have another angle."

Lifting the telephone receiver, she gave Central the office number of Signe Johansen. "Signe, this is Marcy Tarrant. How about lunch today? Good. I'll meet you at Mayes Oyster House at one o'clock."

"Olaf Johansen's niece," she explained to Pellegrini. "She's a good friend, and I think she'll give me the low-down on the situation. If Johansen or Costain calls, stall him."

Marcy and the beautiful Scandinavian girl had hit it off from their first meeting. Being an equal in a world of male executives was not easy, so Signe enjoyed Marcy's company to discuss problems and mutual plans. Men might call Signe the Ice Maiden, but her well-known reserve melted when she was with Marcy.

Over lunch, Marcy recounted the odd developments which involved Signe's uncle, the president of the Blue Star Line.

"I find it rather mysterious," Marcy concluded. "Your uncle is wealthy enough to buy a dozen Rolls-Royces, if he wished."

Frowning, Signe took a surreptitious look about the cafe. She leaned toward Marcy, emphasizing her words with the fork she was using on her crab *louis*. "Uncle Ole is, Marcy. Except—here I go, telling tales out of school, so keep this in the very strictest confidence. You see, shipping lines can be big winners, which means they can also be big losers. It takes a colossal investment, but in a way it's a nickel-and-dime business. We were hit hard by the fire, a ship, buildings, our new warehouse. Two of our best customers have gone bankrupt. So our companies are in a financial bind at the moment. Oh, it's nothing serious in the long run, but right now we're in arrears on a big loan from Costain Brothers, in the area of a million dollars. Paul Costain hasn't threatened foreclosure, exactly, but he has dropped some hints."

"So Mr. Paul Costain is applying pressure on your uncle to get his way," Marcy said, a thread of anger in her voice. "Signe, it's so ridiculous, like using a cannon to kill a sparrow.

Why is Paul resorting to such heavy blackmail, merely to gain the priority on an automobile?"

"You want to know? Another well-kept secret, Marcy," Signe said, toying with her dessert. "Or is it secret that the Costains are in tough straits, financially? Try this. If Paul Costain appears on the streets of San Francisco in a brand-new, horribly expensive motor car, wouldn't it scotch rumors that the Costains are strapped for money? With the Assurance Costain matter hanging over his head, the man needs breathing room. Our wolves love a cripple. Right now they are drooling over the chance Costain's might be one. Paul's move might be enough to keep them from ganging up and eating him alive."

"It seems far-fetched," Marcy said slowly. "It seems like such a small thing, to keep a firm out of bankruptcy."

"It's the only guess I can give you," Signe said. "You know how illogical men's minds are, honey. I can just hear some old gaffer holding forth: 'Costain's? They can't be in such poor shape. The young fellow just bought a new Rolls-Royce car, twenty thou if it's a cent. That's the kjnd of company I give my business to.' " Signe stood up, gathering purse and gloves, slipping into her damp coat. "I've got to dash, Marce. Hope I've been of some help. You going to let Paul have the car?"

"Uh-uh," Marcy said tersely.

Signe grinned at her and went out.

Marcy was working at her desk when Del Pellegrini came in. He said, "Costain called while you were at lunch. Said he'd be in at three o'clock, 'to get to the bottom of this matter' in his words."

"How did he sound?" Marcy asked.

"All burned up. Mad," Pellegrini said ruefully. "He had this peasant cringing under the lash, I tell you."

"Poor Del!" Marcy said, chuckling. "Leave him to me, I'll make him sing a different tune."

At three, Beulah Danaher brought Paul Costain to Marcy's office, gave her a broad wink, and fled. Few secrets around Tarrant Motors, Marcy thought. She said, "Hello, Paul."

Before he answered, Paul took off his dripping coat, shook the water from his fedora, and hung the garments on the rack. He took a seat opposite Marcy, adjusting the crease of trousers over his knees. He straightened the knot in his cravat.

He's making sure I get the proper impression, Marcy thought. *The man of substance, sure of himself, ready to let*

the world cater to him. She knew he was a handsome devil, no doubt of it, that brushing of silver at the temples, the slight bulge at the waistline of his beautifully tailored suit, from bountiful corporate lunches, surely. The pencil mustache was fuller now, the gleaming teeth slightly marred by a gold inlay in one incisor. He looked at her with eyes stern yet limpid.

"Marcy, so good to see you. You're looking well," he said. He cleared his throat. "Now, young lady, I want to know truthfully and in precise detail, exactly what the hell is going on here."

Taking command of the situation, Marcy thought. She smiled and asked, "About the Rolls-Royce, I suppose you mean?"

"Of course about the Rolls-Royce. Tarrant Motors has the only Rolls-Royce franchise this side of Ketchum and Company in Ottawa. If you continue to refuse to sell me the car immediately, a cablegram will go to Charlie Rolls asking him to intervene."

"Now, Paul, a little of your old arrogance goes a long way," Marcy chided him. "Charles Stewart Rolls is my personal friend. How do you think I wangled this franchise? So let's get to the real heart of the matter. One, how do you propose to pay for this motor car, the two-seater, I believe it is?"

"I'll pay for it when I get damned good and ready!" he said sharply. "What's the matter. Isn't the credit of the great bank of Costain Brothers sufficient?"

"Frankly, Paul, no."

His head jerked. "Are you crazy? The name Costain is good for a million dollars in any metropolitan bank in the world. That's the trouble doing business with a woman. She simply can't understand anything more complex than two and two."

"Let's get this straight, Paul." In spite of her growing anger, she managed to keep her voice level. "I have my sources. I know the great house of Costain could come tumbling down like a house of cards any minute. That's the firm that wants me to turn over a twenty-thousand dollar automobile on sheer jawbone. You're a bad risk, Paul. Tarrant's won't do it."

"I'll pay cash, then. I can—"

She shook her head. "Not that, either. We have only four units coming in this shipment, and you are far down on our list of priorities."

"Johansen realeased his priority to me. I told your stupid salesman that."

"It is not in Johansen's venue to tell Tarrant's how to do business. If he doesn't want the Silver Ghost, we'll refund his advance payment and sell the car to the next man on our waiting list."

"The priority is his to use as he sees fit."

"His option is with us. If he wants to buy and pay for the car, then sell it to you, we wouldn't like it, but we couldn't object. You've tried that, eh? Johansen won't get involved in that, I'm guessing. No, Paul, you will not get the car. Tarrant Motors has built a reputation over the years for absolute fair dealing. I'm not going to risk losing it."

He stared at her, his lips twisting. "Marcy, I've got to have that Rolls."

"Nothing doing, Paul. Go down the street to your pet Vinca agency and buy a car there. You know how they are made, I've heard."

"It won't—it just won't serve my purpose."

She smiled. "How well I know it. My mechanics call the Vinca a piece of junk. Quite a come-down for the car that Carlo Ferroni designed, in the factory you stole from him. Your brain conceived that banditry, Paul, not Mme. Demaret's."

"What happened to that bogus Italian count is none of your concern, Marcy. Now call your man Pellegrini in and we'll get the papers signed for my Rolls."

She stood up and walked to the coat rack. She took down his coat and fedora and thrust them at him. "Goodbye, Paul," she said.

She saw the flush of anger touch his cheeks, and a distended vein throbbing at his temple. Taking the coat over his arm, he jammed the hat down over his slightly receding hairline. "I'll give you until tomorrow to think it over, Marcy," he said. "That will give you a chance to remember how we felt about each other in the old days. I needed you then, and I need you now."

"Needed me? Paul, you didn't show that need very well. You dropped me heartlessly for your own selfish plans. Just as you did my cousin Patsy, when her need was even greater."

"Patsy, eh?" He stared at her speculatively, as if some plan was germinating in his mind. "Marcy, you want to play tough? I can play tough too. I can circulate the word that your son is a bastard that doesn't belong to you, that you stole him and pretended to be his mother. I have friends

on the papers who would love a nice juicy story like that. Costain Brothers buys a lot of advertising. We could follow with another story giving the name of the real mother."

"And the father, too?" she asked in a voice dripping with ice. She leaned toward him. "Paul, you just go ahead with your cute blackmail. You'll make yourself the laughing-stock of the entire city. You see, the little boy was killed tragically in the earthquake."

He looked at her with a stunned expression. Then he said, "Oh, my God!" and fled from the office as if he had been seared by a red-hot iron.

Disturbed, depressed by the encounter with Paul, torn by recurring memories, Marcy worked hard through the dismal afternoon. She hardly knew it when Beulah Danaher stuck her head in the door and said, "Good night, Marcy" and was gone. Dimly she knew that the shop sounds had died away, and Tarrant Motors was battened down for the night. In the silence she added up the scores she had against Paul Costain, and the total appalled her. Now at last the final vestige of any feeling she had for him was swept into oblivion. Yet, she thought dully, she didn't want revenge on the man. He had enough troubles. But she would no more sacrifice herself to him, not in business, not in love.

She sighed and stood up. She put on her Macintosh, her sou'wester and her rubbers. Passing through the shop, she could see Cal Plumb still working in his glass cubicle, and called a good night to him. He looked up in the harsh light of an unshaded electric bulb, and waved. Going out the side door, she made sure the night latch clicked as she closed it. She turned up the street toward Franklin, and as she did so, an auto horn hooted at her.

She saw the car was an old Ferroni Vinca, and recognized it as the one she had sold Norbert Costain several years ago. Paul was huddled in the driver's seat. Marcy had a vagrant thought: how outdated this excellent car had become in these few short years. As Paul waved and beckoned, she thought, *I might as well get it over with*, and she walked over to the car.

"Marcy, I must talk to you," he said, humble now. He slid over in the seat to open the far door. "Come, get in, we'll go for a short ride."

"I've got to get home, Paul," she said.

He shook his head. "I happen to know you have no appointments, and there's no one waiting for you. At least so I was told by your maid Lulu when I called."

Knowing she was being stupid, she got into the car, for Paul still had a thin trace of magnetism. Getting out, he cranked the Vinca into life, and took the wheel. The old car rumbled pleasantly as he put it into gear and drove up the street.

"Paul, this must be short," she said. "I've already thought things over, and I simply cannot do what you ask. That act of favoritism would spread over the city in no time, and my customers would begin badmouthing Tarrant's. I can't afford that, Paul."

"But Marcy, Marcy, I'm desperate. What you've heard about Costain Brothers is true, but you haven't heard the half of it. I'm baring my very soul to you, Marcy," he pleaded.

His abject plea made her uncomfortable. She said, "Please, Paul, I don't want to hear about it."

"But you must. Listen, you know Mme. Demaret, *Maman.* She's a cold woman, as hard as steel, and she never forgets an offense, real or imaginary. She has never forgiven you. That's why she crucified your friend Ferroni. She felt that you sent Jacques to his death, so she got her revenge on you by making Ferroni your surrogate."

"I suspected that was why Carlo was ruined," she said. "But you were her right hand, her willing tool."

"God help me, I was. I was jealous, Marcy. After that quarrel in the garden at Ashdown, I began to realize what I had lost when I lost you."

His words did not touch her, for she knew they were specious. She said, "But what has Mme. Demaret to do with this matter of the car?"

"Everything. I've gotten into the bad graces of *Maman.*"

Good enough. Now you will feel the heavy hand, Marcy thought. She watched Paul handle the wheel as he turned a corner, the heavy car sliding a bit on the wet pavement. He was too fast, she observed with no great interest or fear. Desperate, was he? The thought flashed through her mind of a desperate boy, hopeless on a windswept hill in New England that summer so long ago: Would Paul follow Barry, and Jacques? Panic touched her as she knew she couldn't let that happen.

"Tell me the rest, Paul," she said gently now.

"My father had been ill longer than we knew," he said, clutching the rim of the steering wheel until his knuckles showed white. "When I was called home, I had to get into the affairs of the firm. I got a terrible jolt, I tell you. Costain

Brothers was barely above water, and was sinking fast. So I took a desperate measure. I used a power of attorney I had been given by Mme. Demaret to negotiate a big loan from the Carter National to Costain *Frères*. Then I transferred that money from their account into the account of Costain Brothers."

"Tricky business, Paul, but not criminal."

"Not so far, but damned close to the edge. And when *Maman* hears about it—whew! But I can still save my skin, Marcy. Carter National has been holding the papers. They will reach Paris in another fortnight. By that time I may manage to collect some blocked credits, and my dear mother came through like a trooper with all her diamonds. We took a beating on those, but it's cash. The rest I can make up with a new loan from another source, and the total will pay off Carter National. So that's why I need the car."

"You lost me just about there," Marcy said. She gripped the armrest tight as Paul swung the Vinca sharply east into Market Street. "How can a Rolls-Royce help you?"

"It's a symbol of status. They are owned only by the elite, the *crème de la crème*."

She laughed. "The Costains need status? Paul, you're old San Francisco. Your mother is a pillar of the Nautilus Club and the Friday Night Cotillion. Your father is a Bohemian and a power in E Clampus Vitus. Don't try to tell me—"

"I won't lie to you, Marcy. The Rolls is not for me."

"You've been stalling me, Paul. The whole truth, now, or you've killed any possible chance," she said, angry again.

"I said I can get a loan, to save me from going to hell. The man who will lend it to me came out of the gutter, and still has one foot in it. His one ambition in life beyond getting filthy rich is to be considered one of the élite of San Francisco, a member of high society. He has been told that owning a Rolls-Royce is the ultimate symbol of the top dog. So he wants one. He'll pay anything, do anything, to get it. I told him I had an angle. I worked on Johansen. Marcy, I must be allowed his priority."

"You're joshing me, Paul. No man could think the mere ownership of a car would elevate him into the upper crust," she said. She gripped the armrest as he turned north off Market, crossing to the slant of Geary Street. He was driving aimlessly, she thought, and still too fast.

"This man would," he said through clenched teeth. "He's

venal enough, ambitious enough, to believe anything. His name is Quincy Yount."

"Yount the promoter? The member of the Board of Supervisors? Paul, you can't get into his clutches! He's one of the vice lords of the Barbary Coast, and he intends to build it up bigger and rottener than ever. He's the man who blocked the Burnham plan."

" 'Needs must when the devil drives,' " Paul quoted. "Yount has the cash, and I want it. All money is the same, Marcy, it's spendable. A man named O. Henry wrote a story once called *The Tale of a Tainted Tenner*. Read it some time. Hey, there's a car following us."

Turning, Marcy peered through the cloudy isinglass window of the roadster's fabric top. There was a car at a respectable distance behind them. Paul turned a corner back toward Market, and the other car turned too.

"Just coincidence, Paul," Marcy said. "Paul, with Quincy Yount involved, I absolutely refuse to let you have the Rolls."

"Oh, hell, Marcy, listen to reason," he said. "Yount knows you only have a few coming, and he wants to be one of the first owners. That's how I got my clout. I guess he knew you wouldn't sell a Rolls to him. So be reasonable. You weren't always so ethical—you slept with Jacques to cinch that loan for the Ferroni fellow."

"That tears it, Paul. I wouldn't give either Quincy Yount or you the sweepings from a livery stable."

"Bitch!" he snapped, and turned again down Market. He dodged a streetcar, and the Vinca slipped sideways on the wet steel of the rails. He managed to straighten out the car, and growled, "That other car is still behind us. I'm going to lose him."

"Paul, you'll kill us both! Slow down."

Instead, he stepped harder on the throttle. The Vinca skidded across the front of a brewery dray, and made the team of an oncoming phaeton rear high. He grazed another tram car as he wrenched the wheel, and with a scream of tires the Vinca rocketed across the wide swath of Market into narrow Sansome Street at Sutter.

It gave Marcy some satisfaction to say, "He's still right with us, Paul."

"I'll lose him on this hill," Paul said confidently. "I got a look at him on that last turn. He's driving a little old Oldsmobile."

Relief and joy flooded over Marcy. Carlo! The used road-

ster she had given him to get back and forth from his shop and his boarding house, to pick up supplies, had been one of the units lent to the Committee during the fire, and so badly misused. When Carlo would tire of working on drawings, or was temporarily stumped on his engine, he would put in hours on the little car. Marcy didn't know what he had done to it, but it purred like a housecat, and was as quick and agile as a gazelle. *Carlo would find a way to stop Paul,* she thought, and relaxed.

That was something of a feat, for Paul was driving like a wild man. He stood on the brake pedal, and with tires screaming, he wrenched the Vinca around a corner and up Bush Street. Marcy braced her feet and hung on, as the car dodged unremoved rubble, and skirted piles of lumber and brick. Lose Carlo? Marcy thought. He knew tricks from European road-racing that Paul never heard of! Amateurs didn't win against experts, no matter how reckless they drove. And God knew Paul was driving like a maniac.

"Paul, slow down!" she cried. "You're going to kill us both."

"I'll lose this freak behind us, and then you and I will talk some more," he said curtly. "You're not getting out of this car until you agree to what I want."

She looked through the dim, rain-clouded back window. Yes, Carlo—for now she was sure it was he—was close behind them. She said, "Paul, nothing will do you any good if we're dead."

He laughed wildly. "If I don't put over this deal I might as well be. Can't you understand, you little fool, that without Quincy Yount the Costains are down the drain? I've got to—" He cursed then, as the Vinca shot into the width of Van Ness Avenue, sending horse-drawn traffic into a snarl, driving a hansom cab and a delivery van clear up onto the sidewalk. Yet as they stormed up Bush Street, the little Oldsmobile was crowding almost onto the spare tire of the Vinca.

Speechless now with rage and frustration, Paul urged the Vinca up the steepening grade. Across Franklin, then Gough, the car and its pursuer topped the long hill. Ahead over low buildings were the gaunt bare branches of the monster eucalyptus trees around the decayed Bell mansion. Those trees were rumored to have been planted by the famous, or infamous, Mammy Pleasant, the giant black woman who had been cook and housekeeper for Bell, and who had inherited his fortune after the mysterious death of her employer. The

whispered rumor was that Mammy Pleasant was privy to every skeleton in every closet in San Francisco, and had made it pay.

But Marcy had no time to dwell on ancient history. For now Paul twisted the Vinca into a sweeping turn south on Octavia Street. The car skidded, paralleling the avenue of trees. Now the Olds came even, turning inside the Vinca, and edged the heavier car toward the curb. Metal clashed, tires screamed. Marcy, hanging on for dear life, caught a glimpse of Carlo's face, grim and determined, a taut mask of concentration as he inched the Vinca toward the street edge.

"I'll show the son-of-a-bitch!" Paul shouted. He threw his weight on the rim of the steering wheel. "Take that, God damn you!" he yelled, as the Vinca slammed sideways into the lighter car. The Olds went squealing into a spin, and Marcy could see Carlo wrestling with the wheel to control the car.

That desperate action might have spelled triumph for Paul, yet there was a price to pay. The Vinca too began to spin on the wet pavement. Without Carlo's experience, Paul did not have the skill to handle the wildly skidding car. The rear wheels whipped around, and the Vinca slid sideways along Octavia Street. A sheet of water and slime fanned high from the locked wheels as the Vinca climbed the curb, and as inexorable as a juggernaut, slammed its left side into the massive bole of a eucalyptus tree.

The force of it tore Marcy free from her locked grip on the armrest, and hurled her across the car. She cannoned into something—someone—Paul. Pain ripped at her and she screamed, "Carlo!" Then blackness intervened, and there was—nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII

Afterwards, Marcy could remember only a confusion of voices, of shouted orders, of horses' hooves and rattling wheels. Once, quite distinctly, she heard Carlo say, "Dammit, go easy there. Be careful. Easy, easy." Then she found herself on some kind of soft pad and the rain stopped dripping on her face. She opened her eyes, and a slash of pain drove them closed again. Then the gentle warmth of Carlo's hand touched her forehead, and she slept.

She woke to a flood of sunshine brightening the small room where she lay. *Why, it's tomorrow,* she thought illogically. Tentative movement made her head hurt, and she found she could not lift her left arm. But in spite of assorted aches and pains throughout her body, she felt rather well. And hungry. She reached for the bell.

"You're awake." The nurse quoted the obvious. She slid a thermometer under Marcy's tongue, read it without comment, fluffed up Marcy's pillows, and cranked up the head of the bed. "Are we ready for breakfast now?" she asked.

"We are," Marcy assured her. "We're hungry. Nurse, what's the score? Where am I hurt?"

"Here and there," the nurse said evasively. "Much less than we feared, however. But the doctor will have to tell you about that. I'll send in your breakfast." And she was gone before Marcy could ask about Paul Costain.

The aide who brought the breakfast was a smiling little Chinese girl, and Marcy guessed there would be no point in questioning her. So Marcy applied herself to the food, eating awkwardly with her good right hand. The tray was cleared away and Marcy leaned back, wishing someone, anyone would come in and explain things. *At least I wasn't killed,* she thought, and shuddered at the memory of that terrible crash against the eucalyptus tree.

At last the doctor came in, young, rather handsome, his harried expression easing when he saw how pretty his redheaded patient was. He examined her head wound, said, "H-m-m," and renewed the turban of gauze around her head. He checked the sling on her left arm, said, "H-m-m"

again, and listened to her heart, placing the cup of his stethoscope carefully against the tender skin of her breasts.

Coiling up the stethoscope, he said, "How do you feel?"

"Head aches a little, that's all."

"That's not strange. You took a vicious bump, young lady. When they brought you here to St. Vincent's yesterday evening, you had a mild concussion. But it seems to have cleared up."

"And beyond the head?" she asked.

"Cracked collarbone, your left thigh bruised from the knee up, a wrenched back, and a covey of black and blue spots elsewhere. Nothing that won't mend soon. In my opinion, Miss Tarrant, you're a damned lucky girl."

Marcy managed a smile. "My late father was known far and wide as Tough Tom Tarrant. I expect I inherited my durability from him. Now, Doctor, what about Paul Costain?"

The young doctor's face grew grave. He stared at her as if trying to fathom her motive for asking. He guessed wrong. He said, "He's alive. Now stop worrying your pretty red head about him, and concentrate on getting well yourself."

"But is Paul badly hurt?"

"I'll discuss that with you later. Now I'm going to have the nurse give you a pill, because I want you to sleep until lunchtime."

Frustrated, she dropped her effort to find out about Paul, for it was evident his condition was serious. In spite of what he had done, she felt sad for him, as she would have for any person hurt or dying. She was still trying to cast off the depressing thoughts of pain and death when the pill took effect and she slept.

When she woke just before noon, her headache had vanished. She opened her eyes to find Carlo sitting beside her bed. When she smiled at him, his anxious expression changed to relief.

"Marcy, my darling, I was frantic about you," he said, taking her hand. "You are better? You are not badly hurt?"

"I'll soon be as good as new," she assured him. She squeezed his toil-worn hand. "Carlo, I've got to know. What about Paul?"

He shook his head. "Pretty badly smashed up. A broken pelvis, possible skull fracture, his left arm broken in two places, his right wrist broken. The doctor says he will live, but he'll be a long time recuperating."

"Oh, I'm sorry! Even though it's his fault I'm lying here,

I can't be vindictive. Carlo, tell me all about it, especially how you were miraculously there, when I needed you."

"I'll always be around when you need me, *cara mia,*" he said gently. "But this time it was pure chance. Working at the shop, an ignition problem wouldn't work out, and I was gloomy and depressed. The rain didn't help. So I quit in disgust and drove in to see you. If there was a light in the garage I would offer you a ride home in the rain and we could talk, since the main reason for my gloom was that I was missing you. As I came down the street I saw you get into Costain's car. I didn't like the reckless way he jumped the car from the curb and sped around the corner, so I followed." He took a deep breath. *"Dio mio,* darling, the way that man drove! Like a maniac, close calls, crazy speed, I was worried for you."

"He caught a glimpse of your car and tried to outrun you. I was scared, but when he said the car was a small Olds, I was afraid no longer. I knew it was you, my knight on the iron charger!"

He laughed. "My Rosinante caught him at the turn on Octavia, and I turned inside him to drive him to the curb. When he rammed me, I was so busy keeping my car from turning over I didn't see the crash against the tree, but I heard it. And my heart—it came into my mouth. When I ran to the wreck and saw you lying across Costain, your eyes closed, I thought you were dead for sure. If Costain was still alive, I was ready to kill him."

"The impact threw me across the car, and against Paul. Maybe that cushioned me and saved my life. Otherwise I might have been killed, if I had been thrown into the tree."

"God forbid. Marcy, was the man crazy?"

"Very nearly, he was so desperate," Marcy said. Tersely she recounted the circumstances of the wild ride, the insistent demands of Paul, and the part played by Quincy Yount.

"Paul was trying to frighten me into meeting his demands," she said. "He didn't know I'd ridden in the Milan Cinquecento with one of the world's best drivers."

"I detest the Costains and their families, and their dogs, pigs and chickens," Carlo said solemnly. "Yet I cannot help feeling sorry for the man, even though he and Mme. Demaret forced me into the same kind of corner he now faces."

"But Carlo, you proved your inner strength," Marcy said. "You didn't hurt anyone. Now by your own efforts you are climbing from the nadir of loss to the very heights of success. I know you are. With your engine—"

"And the constant help of Marceline Tarrant," he said, and stood up. "So if the Ferroni-Tarrant Vee-Eight is to revolutionize the motor industry, I must get back to work on it, instead of wasting my time chatting with a beautiful woman." He stooped, kissed her, and took his hat from the table.

"Oh, Carlo, must you go?" she cried. "At least tell me how the engine is coming. Will you have it running soon?"

He did not answer. But in the doorway he turned. Raising his clasped hands high, he shook them in a gesture of self-congratulation. Then he grinned at her and was gone.

That afternoon the young doctor looked at Marcy's chart, then at her. "You're making a remarkable recovery, Miss Tarrant. It can't be just from the medicine I prescribed."

"My medicine is beyond the knowledge of any doctor," Marcy said happily. "In all the world there is no remedy so powerful."

"Love, eh? I saw the young man who left earlier. So I think I'll let him take you home tomorrow." He stuffed his stethoscope into his pocket and looked at Marcy. Hesitantly he said, "You know, I thought Mr. Costain—er, that is, that you—" Caught in his own confusion, he ducked his head and hurried out.

After several days at home, Marcy was learning to manage with one good arm. The turban of gauze was discarded, and replaced by a taped patch. The aches and pains went away except for an occasional twinge. It was only when standing nude in front of her own mirror, that she realized the extent of the blue and yellow and purple bruises that marred her trim body. If Carlo could see her now! she thought with amusement. Those bruises clashed badly with her red hair.

She saw Carlo every day. Every day she called St. Vincent's and inquired about Paul. She found she had not the slightest desire to see him, yet she felt the same compassion for Paul that had touched her with Jacques Demaret. When strong men are tumbled from their pinnacle of virility and success, they take it hard, she thought, much harder than women do. One day the word was that Paul had turned the corner and was on the way to recovery, though that would take many weeks.

Marcy was busy in her office one day when Beulah Danaher ushered in a young man. Marcy looked up to see who was standing there so diffidently. Then she cried "André!" and leaped from her chair to hurry to him. "André Costain!

How wonderful to see you," she said, taking his hands. "Welcome to San Francisco. Sit down and tell me all about yourself."

"I am happy to be here, and so pleased to see my lovely Marcy again," he said, smiling. "I am here. You see, I am still the errand boy, but now a somewhat glorified errand boy, trusted to go half around the world on the great affairs of the house of Costain. And one errand is to express our sadness at your accident, and extend our apologies for the manner in which it was caused."

"Don't blame Paul too much, André," she said. "I think he broke under the stress of all his worries."

"Perhaps. But whatever the reason, we find it not to be forgiven. Costain's asks your clemency, and if there are any costs, any expenses—"

"None, André," she said gently. "We take care of our own. You've seen Paul?"

"Yes, briefly. He is improving, but he will have—how do you say it?—a long haul back to health."

"So he won't be able to handle any business. I suppose, then, you have been sent over to work on the, ah, rather tangled affairs of Costain *Frères*, Costain Brothers, and Assurance Costain."

He nodded gravely. "My first big chance. I have wide powers to settle, to compromise, to salvage assets, and whatever other steps I wish. Most pressingly, I am to make great efforts to restore the prestige and the reputation and the good name of the house of Costain."

"There are some hard feelings," Marcy murmured.

"We know that. We know it will cost money. But Marcy, these questionable dealings have been very disturbing to the directors of our firms. They have always been proud of the reputation of our house in all the money markets of the world. So there has been a shake-up in our top management, most severe. Old faces out, new faces in, new policies, new controls. The name of Costain is to be once again as good as its bond."

"It has become difficult for *Maman?*"

With a little smile, he spread his hands palm outward and shrugged in the Gallic manner. "*Hélàs*, Marcy, Mme. Demaret, she has retired. She now raises roses and grapes at Chateau Orient, and has no more a voice in the affairs of our house. So I come with *carte blanche*."

"To clean up the mess Paul got Costain's into, eh? André, this sounds like a palace revolution."

"In effect," André said, nodding. "Our people learned that the rule of an iron hand also makes enemies. There was much unrest in the firm as more and more *Maman* dispensed with the velvet glove. So she has retired to the flowers and fountains of her chateau, and the ruling clique she had built up has been—ah, dispersed, let us say."

"I can imagine how bitter *Maman* must be," Marcy said. "From power to helplessness, her lot must be rage and tears."

"Few tears from that iron woman," André declared. He stood up to leave. When he bowed low over Marcy's hand he said "I will be in your city for some time. Perhaps we might enjoy a social evening together, Marcy."

"Of course, André," she said warmly, for she had always liked this young Frenchman. "And I want you to meet my fiancé, Carlo Ferroni."

His eyebrows went up. "Count Ferroni, of Ferroni Motors? He is in San Francisco? Marcy, it may please you to know that the treatment of Count Ferroni was in some ways instrumental in the downfall of Mme. Demaret. Our directors thought it very ineptly and unfairly handled, for even if the factory was taken over, the inventive genius of Count Ferroni should have been retained. Without him the record of Vinca Motors has been dismal, the losses staggering. Is it possible that we could get him back?"

"I'm afraid not, André," Marcy said, smiling. "He has some important engineering work in progress, and he is becoming an American citizen."

"I offer him my congratulations both on his work and on his coming marriage," André said. "And Marcy, you are at liberty to tell him of the fine opinion our directors still have of him and his ability."

That did please Carlo, when Marcy told him over chicken cacciatore and manicotti at their favorite Italian restaurant. He enjoyed his vindication, though he nodded agreement with Marcy's statement to André that Carlo would not return to Italy.

She changed the subject. "How is the engine coming?"

"Beautifully. It will be soon, Marcy, soon. I am most happy with her. My figures show she will perform even better than the specifications I set at the beginning."

"I want you to hurry, Carlo. M. Perrault called yesterday to tell me my wedding dress is almost finished."

"And we must not disappoint M. Perrault, eh?" he asked, his eyes twinkling.

The afternoon of the very next Sunday the telephone rang at Marcy's home. Carlo asked, "Darling, you cannot drive yet? Is your man Logan there? Then have him drive you this minute to my shop. I have something to show you."

"Carlo, the engine is ready! How does—"

"Never mind. You'll see when you get here." But she caught the note of excitement in his voice.

Logan Cresap, the ex-coachman, was skillful enough, but by no means a fast driver. Impatiently, Marcy sat on the edge of the seat, and fiddled with her arm sling. "Logan, you're just crawling along," she said. "Can't you drive a bit faster?"

He flicked an admonishing glance at her. He said pointedly, "I ain't got myself a busted collarbone in any automobile yet, and I don't intend to."

So in due time they reached South San Francisco, and pulled up at the yard of Marshall-Osweiler-Tarrant. Marcy jumped down and said, "Please wait for me, Logan," and ran past the parked Olds, which had a dented fender from its joust with Paul Costain's Vinca. She burst into the shop and crossed to the corner allotted to Carlo's work.

He was waiting for her, dressed in coveralls. He stood beside a bulky object hidden under a sheet of stained canvas. As she stopped in front of him, he bowed low, and with a theatrical flair, he threw the canvas aside. "Signa. Tarrant, I present to you the Ferroni-Tarrant Vee-Eight engine, Mark One."

Cleaned up and touched with paint, the engine was a beautiful piece of craftsmanship. Steel and brass and rubber, as intricate and as finely made as a Swiss watch, the engine poised on its stand. It was no longer the inchoate hunk of metal Marcy had been watching take shape; it was a creation, a veritable work of art. No wonder Carlo was proud of it, Marcy thought.

"A pretty thing, darling, but does it run?" she asked.

"Oh, I think so. But let us see," he said. He wheeled up a small steel stand topped by an electric motor with an extended shaft. "You see my new starter, which I have not yet tried to adapt to an automobile," he explained. He engaged the slotted end of the motor shaft through a joint to the front end of the engine crankshaft, beneath the honeycomb of the radiator. "Overrunning clutch," he explained.

He checked once again the mechanical and electrical connections. He turned a small valve in part of the copper tubing. He said, "Signorina, kindly do the honors."

Marcy closed the knife switch of the circuit, and the starter

motor whined. The engine grunted, coughed, and then settled down to a steady roar. At Carlo's signal, Marcy opened the knife switch, and as the electric motor slowed, Carlo wheeled away the stand.

The noise was loud, but it was music to Marcy's ears. She saw that the exhaust manifolds of the two four-cylinder blocks were connected to a large cloth pipe, so the fumes would be vented outside the room. At his shouted invitation, she moved the throttle, and the engine slowed or speeded up, without a miss. Satisfied, she nodded to Carlo, and almost reluctantly, he shut it down.

In the silence that followed he asked, "How do you like her, my dear Marcy?"

"She runs beautifully. But does she develop the power?"

"I wanted to make a good show, but to make sure of her, I cheated a little. I started her last night, and ran the tests. At full throttle, my dear, I got a reading of one hundred and twenty horsepower. Just think, twice what that so-wonderful Rolls-Royce can deliver! Of course she is a long way from line production, but this prototype is such a success, that will come. Marcy, it is beyond my wildest dreams."

"But I am just starting to dream, Carlo," Marcy said. "A new company to make it, with Tarrant Motors behind you. A factory site, a crew, dealerships—why, there's no end to it. But that's for the future. Now there are more important things." She looked at him expectantly.

He looked at her, eyes shining, but he did not answer. Instead he wiped his hands clean with a wad of waste. He crossed the room to a closet against the wall, opened its door, and took out a black, formal tailcoat, of that style called "clawhammer." Reaching up, from a round box he took a tall, shining silk hat, and an immaculate pair of white gloves. He picked up an ebony cane with an ornate gold knob.

Donning the coat over his coveralls, putting on the silk hat at an insouciant angle on his dark hair, slipping on the gloves, he tucked the cane under his right arm. He crossed the room to a smiling Marcy, bowed deeply, and kissed her one free hand. Tucking her arm beneath his left elbow, he began to whistle that old tune she had taught him—"After The Ball"—slightly off key. Stepping to the slow rhythm of the ballad, Marcy and Carlo went out together into the bright sunshine.

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